

THE DEVIL
LOVES ME
by
MARGARET
MILLAR

Two Complete

**DETECTIVE
BOOKS**

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DOWN
AMONG
THE
DEAD
MEN
by
STEWART
STERLING

No. 23
NOVEMBER

The **DEVIL LOVES ME**

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MILLAR**



TWO COMPLETE CURRENT DETECTIVE BOOKS

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THE DEAD MEN**

by **STEWART STERLING**

Two Complete DETECTIVE BOOKS

T. T. SCOTT, President and General Manager

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THE DEVIL LOVES ME

By MARGARET MILLAR

The wedding was so gay—such a colorful occasion—why was the bridesmaid poisoned? Dr. Paul Prye, psychoanalyst and amateur detective, was the groom. Why wasn't he more upset? Duncan Stevens was the best man. Why was his skull caved in? There was another man—he got a bullet in his brain. And another—sandbagged and crammed into a rumble seat—say, what is this? A wedding? Or a funeral? What terrible and ghastly thing was footing its bloody way through that very nice house in that very nice section of Toronto? Truly, the Devil was in love with it, whatever it was. Dreadful premonitions were shaking the sixty-year-old bones of Aspasia O'Shaughnessy. And complete terror stalked the rest of the household. Except one. That one was redheaded. That one got mad . . . Inspector Sands could cut through red tape, could slash at the veil of snobbery drawn by the murderer. But he needed Paul Prye—and the one who got mad . . . *Copyrighted, 1942, by Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc. Regular edition \$2.00.*

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN

By STEWART STERLING

Plenty of dead ones get dragged out of the dark, roily water that runs through the greatest city in the world. The Harbor Police take only routine notice. But when the cadaver comes in installments—a torso, a leg, an arm—that's murder . . . There are lots of murders, sure, but what made Lieutenant Steven Koski do a double-take on this particular butchery was the gadget that came with the torso. In its own frightful little way it was a weapon—the kind of weapon that kills a lot of people kind of quick. And Koski began to move—but fast. The murder marathon took him from a Coast Guard auxiliary vessel (cargo: one stunning blonde) to a waterfront dive. From a union leader's hangout to an executive's luxurious office. From a Chinese laundry to a ship being loaded with sudden death . . . And all the way, a long thin shape, detestable and horrible, paced him. Koski drove himself frantically onward. He had to catch that thing—*had to* . . . *Copyrighted, 1943, by Stewart Sterling. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons. Regular edition \$2.00.*

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THE NEXT ISSUE OF TWO COMPLETE DETECTIVE BOOKS WILL BE ON
SALE AT THE NEWSSTANDS ON NOVEMBER 1, 1943

The **DEVIL** **LOVES ME**

By
Margaret Millar



THE DEVIL LOVES ME

By MARGARET MILLAR

THE ORGAN blared, piped, and pealed, coaxing the bride to come into the aisle. Here comes the bride, shouted the organ, stand by her side. The ladies craned their necks delicately toward the back of the church and resumed their conversations.

"I fry mine in lard . . ."

"He's not half good enough for you, I said . . ."

"Henry, sit up straight. This isn't a sermon!"

The gentlemen tugged at their collars and thought, thank the Lord it's not me.

In the vestry the two elegant young men fumbled with their ascot ties and brushed off their pearl-gray spats.

"Nora's late," said the bridegroom.

"Weddings are sad . . ."

"Maybe she's changed her mind."

". . . and uncivilized. I'd like a drink."

"A drink would be fine."

"I wonder if the minister keeps a little something in case a lady faints."

"Very likely," said the bridegroom.

"Let's find a lady who'll faint."

"Too much trouble. You faint."

"Might spoil my pants."

The society editor of the *Courier* studied the church decorations with a blasé eye.

"Local Girl Plights Troth," she wrote. "One of the most beautiful weddings of the autumn season took place this morning when Miss Nora Kathleen Shane, daughter of Mrs. Jennifer Shane and the late Mr. Patrick Shane, became the bride of Dr. Paul Richard Prye, of Detroit, son of the late Major and Mrs. George Prye. The bride looked beautiful in . . ."

". . . you don't chop the onion fine enough."

"Henry, for Heaven's sake, if you can't keep your eyes open . . ."

"Your life'll be hell, I told her. You'll see."

The organ swelled again, desperately, it seemed, drowning the impatient little

coughs and murmurings from the pews, the shifting of feet, and the rustle of silk. Stand by her side.

It was muted now, and doleful. Above it a high, thin wail came from the front of the church. It grew sharper, higher, now and then blending with the music. The organ stopped with a "Wooooosh!" and the wail went on by itself.

At the sound of it the pews quickened into life. Striped pants clambered past blue taffeta. Mauve silk swooned and black crepe screamed.

Purple faille muttered triumphantly into the ear of agitated rose crepe: "What did I tell you, Jennifer. We should never have let Nora have anything to do with a man we know nothing about. A psychiatrist! Indeed! Is it any wonder I felt disaster in my bones?"

"Do be quiet, Aspasia," Jennifer Shane said.

Mrs. Shane moved briskly into the aisle, a tall, stout, handsome woman with a confident smile and a general air of competence. She walked toward the vestibule, bestowing reassuring nods, holding her rose crepe off the floor with a black-gloved hand.

MISS ASPASIA O'SHAUGHNESSY leaned over and tapped her neighbor on the shoulder. "I predicted this," she said darkly.

The society editor of the *Courier* raised a bored brow. "You did? Well, well. Predicted what?"

"Disaster."

"Really?"

"I frequently do"

"I have an aunt like that," said the society editor.

"I *am* an aunt." Aspasia moved a little closer. "I am the bride's aunt, as a matter of fact, her mother's sister. I told Jennifer that *nice* girls don't marry psychiatrists."

"You'd be surprised what nice girls will

marry," said the society editor sadly. "This is my two-hundred-and-forty-ninth wedding and I should know."

"Really." Aspasia's voice was cold, and she moved away and fixed her eyes glassily on the empty pulpit.

The society editor was quite unmoved by the snub. "It's probably a faint," she said. "A lot of people faint at weddings. Who's the man coming out of the vestry? Bridegroom?"

"Quite," Aspasia said distantly.

The society editor was interested. Very, very nice, she thought, watching Prye moving quickly up the far aisle. Tall. I like them tall. Dark, too, and just young enough and old enough. Thirty-three, perhaps?

"He's handsome as hell," she said to Aspasia. "What's the bride like?"

"She's lovely." There was a faint quiver in Aspasia's voice. "She's very dark, with the most beautiful blue eyes."

"Irish?"

"We are *all* Irish."

At the end of the aisle Prye collided with Mrs. Shane. Without speaking he grasped her arm and hurried her out into the vestibule and closed the door.

A slim red-haired girl in a yellow bridesmaid's dress stood just inside the door. She took a long, shuddering breath and prepared to emit another wail. Mrs. Shane stepped over and seized her by the hand.

"Dinah, *stop* that screaming? What's going on here? What's—"

Her words stopped abruptly as she looked past Dinah's shoulder and saw the small figure huddled on the floor.

Dinah gulped and said, "It's Jane. She's—she's having a *fit*!"

The girl on the floor was moving her arms convulsively, her face twisted as if she were choking and trying to speak.

Nora was on her knees beside her. "Jane, what are you trying to say? *Jane!*"

Prye pushed past Mrs. Shane, drew Nora to her feet, and took her place beside Jane. The lobby of the church had become very quiet except for the small, strangled sounds coming from the girl's throat, and the spasmodic thump of her heels hitting the floor as she writhed. Her eyes were half closed and glassy, and her face was contorting into grimaces as she tried to speak. Her skin had turned a vivid pink.

Prye felt her pulse and lifted one of her eyelids. Her eyes followed his movements, glazed with fear. Her limbs relaxed suddenly and her face grew still.

"She's dead!" Dinah screamed.

Mrs. Shane turned on her. "Dinah, stop that and go away. Phone an ambulance, someone. The General Hospital's just around the corner."

Dinah gathered up her frock and walked down the steps that led into the street, lurching a little as if she were drunk.

Nora was saying hysterically, "She said she felt faint. I told her it was just nerves—"

"Maybe it is."

THE WORDS came from a short, chubby young man lounging against the wall. He was exquisitely pink and blond and exquisitely bored. "I've already sent for the ambulance, incidentally. Perhaps by the time it arrives Jane will have recovered. I seem to remember similar bids for attention on the part of my sister."

"No, Duncan!" Nora cried. "This is—She looks as if she's having a convulsion."

Prye got to his feet, frowning. "She *is* having a convulsion. I think she's been poisoned."

Nora gave a little cry. Duncan Stevens swung round to face Prye. "You're crazy, Prye."

"Take it or leave it, Stevens."

Duncan's face grew pink. He looked like a fat, angry honey bear.

"She'll have to be taken to the hospital," Prye said. "I'll notify the police."

"The police?" Duncan repeated. His pale eyes were frightened. "Aren't you taking just a little bit too much on yourself, Prye?"

"You may think so," Prye said. "You may also go to hell."

"Please," Mrs. Shane said briskly. "There's no need to quarrel. Poison does seem a bit farfetched, of course. Nora, don't twist your veil. But if Paul thinks it's poison, naturally it is."

"Thank you," Prye said dryly.

Nora was sitting on the floor holding Jane in her arms, loosening the girl's clothes.

"I shall tell the minister," said Mrs. Shane calmly.

From the pulpit the minister announced

that there would be a slight delay and asked everyone to remain where he was. The audience began to murmur. The society editor of the *Courier* drew pictures on the back of her notebook. The minister climbed down from the pulpit. The vestryman rang up his wife and told her to grab her hat and come down to the church, something exciting had happened.

An ambulance shrieked to a stop outside the church and two white-coated interns shouldered their way through the waiting crowd into the vestibule. Prye helped them put Jane on the stretcher. He whispered something to one of the interns as he covered Jane with a blanket.

Prye turned to Stevens. "You'd better go along."

"Why me?" Duncan said.

"It's your sister, isn't it?"

"Don't be so superior, Prye."

"I'll go, if you like."

"I don't like." Duncan turned and followed the stretcher toward the door. As he passed Nora he said in a thick voice, "Where's Dinah?"

Nora shook her head. "I don't know." She watched him as he went out. He was holding his silk hat to shield his face from the crowd on the steps of the church. Before the door closed again she heard someone yell, "Where's the bride? We want the bride!" The shout was taken up by the crowd. "We want the bride! Here comes the bride!"

Nora leaned against the door, breathing hard. "We've got to get out of here before that mob—"

"I take it you're standing me up?" Prye said.

"My bridesmaids are gone. Duncan has gone—"

"Take it easy. I'm still here. Is there another way out of this church?"

She bit her lip.

"Downstairs through the Sunday school."

"Let's go."

He gripped her arm hard. They went down into the basement through the Sunday school and the choir room where the black-and-white gowns hung like the skins of giant penguins.

"Got a coat?" Prye said.

"No."

"Better take one of these. Wrap it around you and pin your dress up."

"I won't pin my dress up!" she cried. "I won't! My wedding dress!"

SHE BEGAN to sob. Prye slapped her, waited a moment, and then kissed her. She stopped crying and blew her nose. "You damn gorilla," she said.

"Too true," Prye said. "You've had a lucky, lucky escape."

She had pinned up the dress and was wrapping the choir gown around her.

"Not pretty," Prye said. "But less conspicuous. Lead the way."

The staircase led out to a narrow paved alleyway which ran along the back of the church. Several cars were parked in single file along the alley.

"Recognize any of these?"

Nora pointed: "That's Mother's."

They got in. "Nice of Mother to leave her keys in," Prye said. "I hate stealing anything from a church larger than choir gowns."

He swung the car along the back of the alley and came out on University Avenue. The sharp, damp autumn wind whipped the color into Nora's face. Prye tossed her a package of cigarettes and she lit two and gave one to him. Her hands were quite steady.

Prye turned north on River Road. The rain had stopped and the trees glistened and shook off their bedraggled leaves. The leaves fell steadily, like huge dyed snowflakes.

"Confetti from heaven," Nora said. "And if that's not funny, nothing is."

"Nothing is," Prye agreed. "Tell me about Jane."

"What about her?"

"How she acted this morning."

"I didn't see her until just before we left the house, about ten-thirty," Nora said. "I noticed that she looked a bit pink but she's always experimenting with new make-up so I didn't say anything. Then when we were getting out of the car at the church she said she felt ill. Her voice was funny."

The car stopped in front of an old rambling red brick house separated from its neighbors by tall hedges. Two Mani-toba maples, still thick with rich red-brown leaves, flanked the house on either side. A flagstone walk led up to the massive stone steps of the veranda.

Nora unpinned her dress and removed the choir gown. She took Prye's arm and they walked up the flagstones smiling stiffly, like a bride and groom stepping out of an old album. As they reached the top of the steps the front door opened to reveal a stout, middle-aged woman in a green-and-white uniform. Behind her stood a pretty young parlormaid and a short, handsome man in a white coat. They were all grinning and each held a bag of rice.

"Ye gods," Prye said. "The family retainers. This completes the farce."

Nora's hand tightened on his arm. "Mrs. Hogan will be furious. She's been trying to marry me off since I was sixteen."

Mrs. Hogan was at the moment incoherent with joy. Her round red face was beaming and the rice rattled in her bag like a happy machine gun. Nora looked at her and burst into tears.

Prye withdrew tactfully into the house. In the library he dialed police headquarters and talked for some time to Detective-Inspector Sands. Inspector Sands' answering grunts indicated that he was mildly interested in Prye's story and would appear in person at some future hour, weather permitting.

Prye hung up and called the General Hospital. A female voice informed him cheerfully that Miss Jane Stevens was doing as well as could be expected. No further information was available. So what if he was a doctor? Miss Stevens was still doing as well as could be expected, and good day to him.

Prye uttered a short, descriptive word which could be applied roughly to both Inspector Sands and the female voice and reached in his pocket for a cigarette.

"A match, sir?"

The door of the library had opened noiselessly and the young man in the white coat was standing just inside. He lit a match, applied it to Prye's cigarette, and sat down casually in a chair.

"Make yourself at home, Jackson," Prye said.

JACKSON crossed his legs, smiling. "Thanks. I think I'm worthy to touch the hem of your pants. Maybe not those pants but your everyday ones. I'm a college graduate."

"Always glad to meet an old Yale Man," Prye murmured politely.

"Harvard."

Slightly pink, Prye said, "I've often wondered what happened to old Harvard men. Like wondering what happens to old razor blades. Perhaps you'd like a drink, Jackson?"

"Allow me."

Jackson rose with exaggerated courtesy and went over to the cellarette. "Scotch or sherry, Dr. Prye?"

"Scotch."

Jackson poured out two drinks, brought them over, and sat down again.

"Cozy?" Prye asked.

"Cozy enough," Jackson said, twisting the glass in his hand. His smile had faded and he was looking at the floor as if it had done him a personal injury. His frown made him look even younger, Prye thought. He was probably not much more than twenty, and definitely not a servant.

"Just what are you, Jackson?"

"Houseboy," Jackson said coolly. "A sort of hybrid, half butler, half footman, with a dash of parlormaid."

"The Harvard touch, I suppose?"

"If you say so, sir."

Prye set his glass on the mahogany desk and lit another cigarette. "I wish you wouldn't call me sir, Jackson. In your mouth it's practically an epithet."

Jackson did not reply. He had finished his drink and was sitting staring into his empty glass.

"I heard what you said over the telephone," he said suddenly. "Is it true about Miss Stevens?"

"The library door was shut while I was telephoning, Jackson."

"I opened it. I saw Miss Shane weeping and I wanted to know what was up."

"You're interested in Miss Stevens?"

"She and her brother have been house guests for a week. Naturally I'm interested. I assure you Miss Stevens didn't poison herself."

There was a certain tenseness in his voice. Prye raised an eyebrow and said, "Really? How can you be sure?"

"I know Miss Stevens better than you do, Dr. Prye. You arrived only last night. I've been watching Duncan Stevens and his sister for a week."

"Watching?"

Jackson flushed. "Observing, I mean. I consider Mr. Stevens an interesting psychological case. He is a smooth bully."

"I think so," Prye agreed.

"He is so smooth that Miss Stevens doesn't know she's being bullied. Miss Stevens' I.Q. is not very high."

"It hits the pit," Prye said. "Undoubtedly."

"Will she die?"

"I don't know. I think not. I guessed the poison that was used, you see. The rest is up to the hospital."

"What poison was it?"

Prye said, "It hasn't been verified."

"Even if she doesn't die, it will be attempted homicide?"

Prye nodded.

"And who do you think attempted it?"

Jackson said softly. "Miss Stevens is practically a stranger in Toronto, like yourself." He paused, grinning. "I know less about you than I know about the others in this house."

"This house?" Prye echoed.

"Miss Stevens hasn't been out of the house since yesterday afternoon. Interested?"

"Very."

JACKSON'S voice was still soft. "Of course maybe it was a long-range poison and took a long time to work. Still, I can't understand why it was arranged for the victim to collapse in a crowd of people containing a doctor."

"Can't you?"

"Unless," Jackson said, "it was the wrong victim." He got up, straightened his white coat, and smoothed his dark hair.

Prye said, "Wait a moment."

Jackson turned around. "Yes, sir."

"How long have you been here, Jackson?"

"Two months."

"Why?"

"Why? Fifty a month and full maintenance. That's a fine reason. All my reasons are fine by virtue of their simplicity. I eat because I'm hungry and I sleep because I'm tired, and I work because I need some place to sleep and something to eat, sir." He paused. "Is there anything else you require, sir? If there is, just ring and I shall appear instantaneously."

"Don't lurk behind doors," Prye said.

"I know someone who got a nasty black eye doing that."

Jackson grinned. "I know just the thing for black eyes." He went out, closing the door quietly behind him.

Prye finished his cigarette and then went upstairs to his room and changed from his morning clothes to a gray tweed lounge suit. The change was good for his morale. He felt less like a frustrated bridegroom and more like coping with a murderer.

"Murder," he said aloud. He went back into the clothes closet, removed a folded slip of paper from his morning coat, and walked down the hall to Nora's room.

She said through the door, "Come in," in a voice slushy with tears. He went in and found her sitting on a couch beside the window. She had changed into the dress he liked best, a gray wool affair with collar and belt of red linen. Her eyelids were still rather pink.

He kissed her. "Feeling better?"

She smiled slightly. "Mrs. Hogan is gunning for you, darling. She thinks you poisoned Jane to get out of marrying me. At least that was the implication."

"It's not so."

"Here they come."

"Police?"

"Mother and Aunt Aspasia and Dennis Williams."

They both looked out of the window and watched a low-slung blue sedan disgorge its occupants on the driveway. Mrs. Shane, her black velvet hat askew on her head, was in command. She was holding Aspasia's arm firmly in one hand and with the other she was making vague but magnificent gestures to the driver of the car, a tall, deeply tanned young man who was to have been one of the ushers.

"My mother, right or wrong," Nora said.

Prye was watching Williams. "He buys that tan in a bottle. I must warn Dinah."

"Just because your own romance has broken up I suppose you want to make others suffer," Nora said. "Besides, it's not out of a bottle, it's out of a jar and costs three dollars per ounce."

Prye looked at her. "You *are* feeling better. Well enough to stand a third shock?"

"Shock?"

He took the folded paper from his vest pocket. "Ford found this in his pocket

where the ring was. The ring is gone. So, I may add, is Ford."

"Why?"

"I told him to hop back to Detroit. There was no sense in involving my best man in this mess." He handed her the paper. "It was put in place of the ring to make sure I wouldn't miss it. Read it. You might recognize the style."

She unfolded the paper and stared at it blindly for a moment. Then the small, precise letters written in blue ink came into focus.

DR. PRYE: *I have arranged a little surprise for you. Knowing how interested you are in murders I have decided to give you one on your own doorstep, as it were. Don't be too flattered. I intended to do it anyway. But the setting is too good to miss. I have always been intrigued by the funereal aspect of weddings and the hymeneal aspect of funerals. It is high time someone combined the two. I am leaving this note in your friend's pocket in place of the ring, not because you can stop the murder, but merely to assure you that I am perfectly serious.*

The note fluttered to the floor.

"Recognize the writing?" Prye said.

"No."

"The style?"

"N-no." Her voice was less confident.

A soft rap on the door sounded and Jackson came in very respectfully and said,

"The police are here, Miss Shane."

II

THE ARRIVAL of Detective-Inspector Sands and Sergeant Bannister was witnessed from behind at least one pair of curtains.

At the drawing-room windows stood Dennis Williams. Except for the studied blankness of his face he seemed at ease as he watched the two men step out of the car and walk unhurriedly along the flagstones.

From behind him Mrs. Shane said, "Dennis, what are you staring at?"

He turned, and the light from the windows fell on his right eye. It was swollen and the eyelid was a rich plum color.

"Police," he said.

Mrs. Shane rustled over to the windows. "They don't look like policemen. How do you know?"

"The big one has flat feet and the smaller one is too casual."

"What very odd reasons, Dennis!"

Dennis smiled at her lazily. "Shall I go on? The small one is the inspector, because the big one keeps looking down at him, waiting for him to speak."

"Since you're in a deductive mood," Mrs. Shane said rather crossly, "you might deduce where Dinah has disappeared to."

Dennis touched his eye lightly. "Dinah and I are not very friendly today. She didn't confide in me."

"Well, she should be here. The inspector will want to question her."

"Why?"

"Why? Because one of the servants is bound to tell him that she doesn't like Jane." She paused. "Incidentally, Dennis, would it be asking too much to ask you to stop making passes at Jane while you're here?"

The careful blankness disappeared from his face. "That's a—"

"I am quite aware of certain incidents, Dennis. Age may have cost me my figure but not my eyesight."

"I didn't—"

"The discussion is closed."

To emphasize her words she went back to the refectory table at the other end of the room and resumed her work on the wedding presents.

"Fifteen coffee tables," she muttered. "Dear heaven."

Dennis did not pursue his point. He was too busy listening to the voices in the hall outside. A pleasant, mild voice was saying, "I'm Detective-Inspector Sands. This is Sergeant Bannister."

"I'm Jackson, sir."

"Please close that door, Dennis," Mrs. Shane said briskly, "I have to think."

Dennis went over and slammed the door.

In the hall Jackson made a gesture to take the inspector's coat and hat.

"No, thanks," Sands said. "I'll keep them. Is there a room I can use while I'm here?"

"The library, sir. In here." Jackson opened the door and Sands went inside.

"You'll come in too, Jackson?"

Jackson stared at him. "Yes sir."

"Of course you will," Sands said.

Sergeant Bannister's teeth gleamed in a smile but he said nothing. Sands nodded at him almost imperceptibly, and Bannister ushered Jackson into the library and went out, making a funny little deferential bow before he closed the door.

Jackson stood near the door, his hands clasped behind his back. His breathing was loud and quick, and to cover the sound of it he said, "You want to know who was in the house at the time Miss Stevens was poisoned?"

"I don't know when she was poisoned," Sands said. "Perhaps you do?"

Jackson flushed, but the inspector was not looking at him. His pale eyes were studying the wall above Jackson's head. He turned suddenly, removed his coat and hat and laid them on a chair. Then he sat down behind the big mahogany desk. It made him look smaller.

Jackson watched him, hypnotized. There was a deadness about his face and his movements. As if he has been dead a long time and is only going through the motions, Jackson thought. He is corpse-gray, even his hair and his suit and his eyes, and his voice doesn't come from him but from somewhere, something, near him.

"I'm very embarrassed," Sands said.

HIS SMALL sigh slithered down from the ceiling and tickled Jackson's stomach. Jackson giggled. "You mustn't stare," Sands said. "Are there many guests in the house?"

"N-no sir." His voice shook when he smothered the giggle.

"Tell me."

"Dr. Prye, who phoned you. Miss Stevens and her brother, Duncan. Mrs. Dinah Revel and her—her fiancé, Mr. Williams."

"Mrs. Revel widowed or divorced?"

"Divorced."

"And?"

"J-just divorced," Jackson stammered.

"I meant, and what others?"

"Mrs. Shane and her daughter, Nora, and Mrs. Shane's sister, Aspasia. And the servants."

"How many?"

"Three. Myself, Mrs. Hogan, the cook, and Hilda Perrin, the general maid."

Sands was quiet, writing the names in

his notebook. Jackson stood and watched him. The silence was thin, eerie. He heard his own voice floating around the room. "Hilda Perrin, the general maid," from the ceiling and the walls. "Hilda Perrin, the general maid." He lost track of time. Had he said it an hour ago, five minutes ago?

"You are nervous Jackson?" Sands said without looking up.

"No sir."

"Miss Stevens is an American, I understand?"

"Yes sir. She lives in Boston."

"And Mrs. Revel?"

"Mrs. Revel and Mr. Williams both come from Montreal."

"Her fiancé, you said?"

"That's what I said."

"It doesn't matter." He looked up. "I'd like to see this Dr. Prye who telephoned me."

"Right, sir." Jackson backed toward the door as if he were glad to escape.

"Jackson."

"Y-yes sir."

"I am not a sinister figure, surely?"

Jackson shook his head violently and moved out of the door.

Or am I? Sands thought. Perhaps I am. He looked down at himself, laughing softly. When he looked up again Prye was standing in the doorway, watching him.

Sands' laugh fell away into an echo. "Dr. Prye? Come in and close the door." He met Prye's puzzled gaze with a smile. "Will you sit down?"

Prye closed the door and sat down on the red leather window seat. He was still speechless from his first sight of Sands chuckling softly to himself in an empty room.

"I know a little about you, Dr. Prye," Sands said.

Prye found his voice and a smile. "Propaganda," he said.

"You are a consulting psychiatrist, permanent home Detroit, come to Toronto to attend a wedding. My name is Sands, by the way. Inspector White of the Provincial Police is a friend of mine. You remember him, of course?"

"Of course," Prye said hollowly.

"I understand he almost shot you."

"Yes."

"Because you interfered with one of his

cases." Inspector Sands coughed nervously.

"Again yes."

"That covers everything, I think. I don't carry a revolver. Is this your first visit to Toronto?"

"I've passed through it before. I've never stayed here."

"But you have acquaintances in the city?"

"The people in this house, and yourself."

"No one else?"

"No one."

"Yet the note your friend found in his pocket was addressed to you. That lessens my work, doesn't it?" Sands paused.

"And where is your friend, by the way?"

"I told him to return home."

"Unwisely, perhaps?"

"It's a quality of invulnerability," Prye said.

Sand's eyebrows moved in surprise. "What is?"

"Your quality. Why you could frighten Jackson. Why you make me tongued-tied. You are an observer, an outsider. We insiders have no weapons against you."

Sands leaned across the desk. "You won't need any. Let me see your letter, will you?"

PRYE PULLED out the letter and gave it to him. Sands read it through quickly, folded it, and put it in an envelope that he took from his coat pocket.

"Long-winded fellow," he commented. "Mildly endowed with humor of a sort. Everything well planned, too. You read the note just before Mrs. Revel screamed at the church?"

"Yes."

"The method would have to be poison, of course, preferably one which could be administered well ahead of time. Is that why you suggested atropine to the intern in charge?"

"Partly. The physical symptoms suggested atropine strongly: dilated pupils, extreme glassiness of her eyes, her inability to speak, the pinkness of her skin. I had still another reason, not so much a reason as a hunch."

He took out a cigarette and lit it.

"The immediate result of Jane's poisoning was that the wedding was stopped. Let's assume that that was the result intended. Bear in mind that the letter was sure to be received before the ceremony

and that the ring was taken. So it occurred to me that if I wanted to break up a wedding I'd give someone in the wedding party a nicely calculated dose of atropine. Or muscarin."

"Why specify the poisons?"

"Because they are the only two poisons in the whole range of toxicology which are perfect antidotes for each other. Although both are effective poisons used separately, used together they nullify each other and are relatively harmless. So that if I gave you, for instance, a half grain of atropine and a doctor followed it up with a similar quantity of muscarin, you'd live to have me arrested for attempted homicide."

"Is this fact widely known?"

Prye said, "It's not the sort of thing that would come out in drawing-room conversation, but it's easy enough to find out."

"What is muscarin?"

"It's the poison obtained from the fly mushroom and is chemically allied to nicotine. It's not easy to obtain like atropine, which is used widely in prescriptions. That's why I'd choose atropine. All right. I break up the wedding by poisoning a bridesmaid. But suppose I have no grudge against the girl. I don't want her to die, so I make sure that the poison is *identified*. Then the wedding would be stopped, Miss Stevens would recover, and all would be well."

The telephone on the desk began to ring. Sands said, "Excuse me," and lifted the receiver. Prye could distinguish none of the words which came over the line but the voice seemed vaguely familiar, high-pitched and excited.

Sands grunted once or twice and said, "Thank you. Fifteen minutes ago? I'll see about it."

He replaced the receiver and looked around at Prye. His eyes were cold. "Your thought processes may be tenuous Dr. Prye, but they'll do."

Prye recognized the voice then, and said, "That was the hospital, I gather. It was atropine?"

"Yes. I knew that before I came here I was at the hospital. Where were you fifteen minutes ago, Prye?"

"Talking to Sergeant Bannister in the hall."

"Fortunate."

Prye leaned forward, frowning. "What does that mean?"

"It means," Sands said, "that fifteen minutes ago an anonymous male voice informed the hospital that Miss Stevens was an atropine case. Your hypothetical poisoner seems to have materialized."

Sands' small gray eyes remained fixed on Prye.

"Materialized," he repeated.

Prye's smile was careful. "I mustn't have any more hunches, must I? No indeed."

"You couldn't have made the telephone call?"

"No."

"And you wouldn't want to stop your own wedding?"

"No."

"Who would?"

There was a long silence. "No one," Prye said at last.

"No tricky wills, no trust funds and the like bearing on Miss Shane's marriage?"

"Nothing," Prye said.

"Miss Shane is an only child, is she not?"

"Yes."

"Possibly her mother would prefer her to remain single?"

Prye smiled. "I think not."

"Her maiden aunt?"

"PERHAPS. But she would hardly choose this bizarre method of keeping her single. Besides, Jane is her favorite niece. Aspasia would have chosen some other member of the party. Did you see Jane? Is she conscious?"

"Conscious but sacrosanct," Sands said sourly. "Guarded by a cordon of young and consequently earnest and ignorant internes. Is the girl pretty?"

"Very pretty. Later on she'll be fat, faded, and stupid. Right now she's curved, blond, and stupid."

"Is she? Her brother, Duncan, seemed bright enough. I saw him waiting in the corridor outside her room. He seems devoted to his sister. He was extremely nervous."

"That's a hangover. He was celebrating the wedding last night. I was not aware that he was devoted to Jane."

The inspector affected surprise. "Really? But then you saw him yesterday for the first time. Devotion between members of

a family has its ups and downs."

"In that case Duncan must have hit a new low last night. When he was drunk to the point of eloquence he told me he disliked me and disliked weddings and that the only reason he'd come at all was to prevent Jane from running away with any of the ushers."

"Sad," the inspector said.

"Love," Prye said, "is always sad."

"No, the other, the lack of feeling and respect for his sister. Unless, of course, the girl is actually a nymphomaniac. Would you say that?"

"No, I wouldn't," Prye said dryly. "I'm marrying into the family."

"Still, she has a weakness in that direction?"

"Oh yes, decidedly."

"And the anonymous telephone call came from a man. It's a small point but —" Sands rose and made a gesture of dismissal. "That's all for now, Dr. Prye."

Prye lingered. "Any chance of my seeing Miss Stevens when you do?"

"If it will interest you."

"It will."

"In that case you'd better have some lunch now. I'm expecting an O.K. call from the hospital at any time."

At the door Prye turned to say, "I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Revel hasn't returned. She left the church before the ambulance arrived."

"Why?"

"Mrs. Shane told her to."

"I'll see Mrs. Shane now. Will you bring her?"

Prye crossed the hall and opened the drawing-room door. Mrs. Shane looked up from her work. Dennis remained slumped in a chair with a book in his hands.

"Inspector Sands would like to see you," Prye said to Mrs. Shane.

"Well, I should think so," she replied crisply. She flashed a look at Dennis. "I am a perfect mine of information."

Dennis slapped his book shut and yawned, too casually. "I've got nothing to lose. Not for anything would I poison a blonde."

"I'm aware of that," Mrs. Shane said. As she passed behind his chair she put her hand on his shoulder for a moment. "I do think you might do something about finding Dinah, however."

"She'll come home," Dennis said, "dragging her tail behind her. My guess is, she's tight as a tick already. We can only wait and find out."

"Very well."

Mrs. Shane closed the door with unnecessary firmness and went into the library. Sands was standing at the window looking out. Without turning he said, "Fine maples, Mrs. Shane."

She was pleased. "They are, aren't they? My husband planted them thirty years ago. This was all country then."

He turned around very gradually and smiled at her. She liked him at once because he looked tired.

"You haven't had any lunch," she said instantly. "Will you stay?"

"No, thank you. Policemen and doctors become accustomed to missing meals."

"Yes, I suppose." She arranged herself in a deep leather chair. "How is Janē?"

"She will recover," he said.

"I thought she would."

He looked surprised. "Why?"

SHE GAVE him a confidential smile. "Because I'm lucky. That must sound very silly indeed. Does it?"

"No. Some people are lucky. It's partly because they believe in their luck. Tell me about your other niece, Mrs. Revel."

"Tell you what?"

"Where she is, first."

"I don't know," Mrs. Shane replied. "Dinah is a free soul. She manages her own life very badly, I'm afraid. But I'm wasting your time."

"No. There's nothing I can do until I talk to Miss Stevens. You are not worried about Mrs. Revel, are you?"

She hesitated. "Not exactly worried. But it's after lunch time and Dinah is dieting again, which means that she goes without breakfast and then appears early for lunch. And it isn't like Dinah to go into hysterics as she did this morning."

"She may be staying with friends."

"No. I don't think she has friends in Toronto. Dennis Williams thinks she is getting drunk. It's not improbable."

"You are admirably frank," he said.

She smiled. "At my age one has no reason not to be."

"You understand that this is likely a case of attempted homicide?"

"Yes. It's not pleasant, but it's better than accomplished homicide. It is puzzling. Jane is an innocuous creature, very like my sister, Aspasia. You will be gentle with Aspasia, I hope. She has a habit of fainting."

"Habit?"

"I think so," Mrs. Shane said firmly.

"More frankness," Sands said with dry emphasis. "You are going to be a very suspicious person indeed."

"I expect so. Are you going to do anything about Dinah?"

"If you want me to, certainly. You might describe her."

Mrs. Shane sat up straight in her chair. "It's not quite fair to ask a woman to describe another woman. We are too realistic about each other. Allow for that. Dinah is tall and thin, about five feet seven, and one hundred and ten pounds. Her eyes are pale blue. She has bright red hair, rather long and curly. I haven't seen her natural complexion for years but she uses Rachel powder. She wears no rouge but a lot of lipstick and eyebrow pencil. All very heathenish but rather attractive."

"Her clothes?"

"An odd shade of yellow. Velvet. Tiers on skirt and a hat of real marigolds. She had no coat."

"Was she driving a car?"

"No. She came to Toronto with Dennis in his car."

"Thank you," Sands said. He went to the door and opened it for her. She walked out, looking a little surprised.

SANDS reached for the telephone, reeled off Dinah's description to the policeman at the desk, and then hung up and called the hospital again. Miss Stevens was doing as well as could be expected. Assured of his identity, the voice added that Miss Stevens had reacted wonderfully to the injections and was well enough to be eating. She was asking for her brother, Duncan. Would the inspector be kind enough to produce him?

"I left Duncan Stevens at the hospital," Sands said acidly. "I didn't smuggle him out in my pocket."

"He left immediately after you did,"

the voice claimed. "I thought you knew."

"I'll find him. I'll be there in half an hour. Keep the girl conscious."

"That's not in my province," the voice said, and disappeared into space.

Sands went out into the hall and motioned to Prye, who was talking to Sergeant Bannister again. Prye came over.

"I hope you don't get married often, Prye," he said. "Another disappearance. This time it's Stevens."

They walked back into the library.

"Best news I've had in years," Prye said. "But my luck won't hold. Stevens has likely gone to another hospital for a quiet session with his d.t.'s"

"Heavy drinker?"

"Chronic, I understand. He's had a good ten years' practice. He's thirty-one."

"The brother is a kind of guardian to his sister?"

"A kind of," Prye said. "Jane's twenty-two and Duncan controls the money until her marriage, in accordance with the family custom. Primogeniture and that sort of thing is very strong in the family"

"Much money?"

"There used to be rather a lot, but Duncan is generous with himself. The best isn't good enough for Duncan. How much this delusion has cost him I don't know."

"Any marriage imminent for the girl?"

"There was once."

"Tell me."

"It didn't come off."

Sands raised his brows. "These half weddings seem to run in the family."

"That one didn't get as far as mine did. Maybe the curse is lifting."

"This was in Boston?"

"Yes. Three years ago. Ask Nora about it. She was there at the time."

"What happened?"

Prye grinned. "Well, Nora swears that Duncan wears blue silk underwear and took a fancy to the young man himself. Nora read a book once."

"I see. Was the girl upset at all?"

"You wait and see what a very great deal it takes to upset a cow."

"Parents both dead?"

"Yes."

They were silent a moment.

"You know when the girl was poisoned?" Sands asked.

"I think so. At breakfast. The time is right. She had breakfast about eight-thirty."

"With whom?"

Prye looked up and smiled rather bleakly.

"With me," he said at last. "With no one else but me."

MISS TOMSON, charge nurse of the accident ward, stepped out of room 202 and thumbed her nose at the door. Then she walked, with no loss of dignity, to the desk.

"Now what do you think she wants?"

Miss Hearst sighed. "A bedpan. All of them do all of the time."

Miss Tomson ignored this. "A powder puff, a comb, lipstick, and some perfume. If it isn't too too much trouble."

"I'll rustle up the perfume," Miss Hearst said smoothly. "You can't beat a drop of formaldehyde behind each ear. It's so clinging."

Miss Tomson remembered her official position and said, "No levity please, Miss Hearst."

"Of course not, Miss Tomson. I was only trying to help."

Mollified by this lip service, Miss Tomson became natural again. "I don't care for these cloying blondes. They should be poisoned every six months as a matter of principle. Still, it's odd, isn't it? It wasn't attempted suicide as most of them are, because she doesn't even know she was poisoned, Dr. Hall says."

"He's been in there for half an hour," Miss Hearst remarked. "He's a sucker for blondes."

Miss Tomson was arch. "Jealous, Miss Hearst?"

"Oh no," Miss Hearst said with a shrug of her starched shoulders. "I could be a blonde myself if I wanted to spend the time on it."

Unaware that harsh remarks were being made about her person, Miss Jane Stevens sank back among her pillows. Miss Stevens herself never made harsh remarks. Her mind moved in a small circle about herself though frequently the circle expanded to include her brother Duncan or some nice new young man she'd met at a party. Or at a hospital.

She smiled up at Dr. Hall, the interne on

the accident ward. "You must be terribly clever. I feel quite well again. When am I going home?"

Dr. Hall returned the smile. "When we get a pretty girl on this ward we can't let her go off the same day."

"What—what happened to me?"

In the coarse white hospital gown she looked very small and fragile. She suspected this fact and endeavored to improve on it by letting one round white arm trail helplessly over the edge of the bed.

"You mustn't think about it," Dr. Hall said.

"Did I faint?"

"Well, in a way."

She sat up, looking at him with frightened eyes. "Look, I didn't have a—a fit? You know what I mean."

"Epilepsy? Oh no."

"Oh well, that's all right." She sank back again. "Where is Duncan? He'll be worried about me."

"He's around somewhere," Dr. Hall replied in the confident voice he used for making statements with no basis of truth.

The charge nurse bustled into the room and announced brightly that she wouldn't want to disturb anybody but Stevens had company waiting and Dr. Hall was wanted immediately in 206.

Dr. Hall scowled at her. "There wasn't anyone in 206 half an hour ago."

Miss Tomson replied sweetly that half an hour was a long time in a hospital.

"Company?" Jane said. "Is it my brother?"

Dr. Hall went out, and Miss Tomson gave Jane a look of synthetic sympathy. "My dear, it's the police!" she hissed, and left Jane flailing her arms and shouting questions at the closed door.

Prye and Sands came in together.

Jane gasped, "Police? What—not Duncan?"

"Nothing to do with Duncan," Prye told her. "How are you feeling, Jane?"

The question calmed her. She gave him a very brave smile. "I'm fine, Paul. Don't bother about me. I'm sorry I spoiled your lovely wedding."

"That's all right. Jane, this is Inspector Sands."

Sands smiled but said nothing.

"You *are* a policeman then?" she said, paling. "What do you want?"

"I hope you're feeling well enough to stand a shock," Sands said mechanically, thinking that she looked well enough insulated.

"Shock? What is everybody so mysterious about today? What shock?"

"You were poisoned this morning."

SHE DIDN'T look shocked at all. She seemed, on the contrary, rather pleased, as if she had been proved right about something.

"You know," she said thoughtfully, "I was positive that the bacon tasted odd this morning. It's no wonder I'm ill. Food poisoning—"

"It wasn't food poisoning," Sands said. "It was atropine."

She was completely blank. "I don't quite know what atropine is."

"It's a poison," Prye said. "Like arsenic, strychnine, the cyanides—"

"Oh." Her mouth opened and her eyes widened as if they were controlled by the same string. She said "Oh," again. That was all.

Prye shook his head sadly and thought, it's impossible to surprise a cow. Either the adjustment is over in a second or there is no adjustment at all. He said lightly, "Know anyone who wants to get rid of you, Jane?"

"You mean, kill me?"

"That's right."

"No, of course not. Why, I've never injured anyone in my whole life. The poison was probably intended for someone else." She paused, her eyes gradually brightening. "That's it, of course! The poison was intended for *you*, Paul. It wasn't for me at all."

"Why me?"

She waved her arm vaguely. "Well, aren't you—I mean, you *are* connected with things like murder and all that, aren't you?"

"That's hardly a reason for poisoning me."

She gazed at him with reproach. "It is a much better reason than anyone has for poisoning *me*."

"You had your breakfast with Dr. Prye this morning, Miss Stevens?" Inspector Sands asked.

"Yes, that's why I'm so sure that the poison was intended for—"

"Yes," Sands said. "Was there any switching of coffee cups? Who served the coffee? Did you have any other liquids? Did you notice any peculiar taste?"

"The bacon," Jane said brightly.

"Other than the bacon?"

"No."

"Tell me everything you did from the time you got up this morning."

"Well," Jane said, "I woke up early, something which I loathe doing, don't you? I put on my robe, it's blue to match my nightgown and I didn't want to dress up before—"

"All right. You came down the stairs. Then what?"

"Then Dr. Prye came down and we went into the dining room. Jackson was bringing in the percolator. Or was it Hilda? I can't remember."

"Jackson," Prye said.

"Of course. It was Jackson. I said good morning to him and he said it wasn't a very nice day for the wedding. Then I sat down. I had grapefruit juice, bacon, one egg, two slices of toast, and some coffee. Jackson poured the coffee."

"I did," Prye said.

"So you did," Jane said. "Anyway, as soon as I tasted the bacon I *knew* there was something odd about it. Rancid, you know. I don't wonder it was bad now that I know—"

"The bacon was all right," Prye said violently. "I didn't have any grapefruit juice but I did have bacon. It was all right. It didn't have any poison on it, in it, or under it. It was swell."

"You needn't repeat it so often, Paul," Jane said coldly. "I understand. You think the poison was put into the grapefruit juice or the coffee and not the bacon. But you needn't even bother thinking it was in the grapefruit juice, because if someone were trying to poison *you*, Paul, they wouldn't put it in *my* drink." She turned to Inspector Sands and smiled at him sweetly. "Would they?"

The inspector was saddened by this appeal. I wonder, he thought, if it's any use. He spoke very slowly and distinctly: "Since it was you, Miss Stevens, who received the poison, I must assume in the absence of further evidence that it was you who were intended to receive it."

JANE WAS trying hard to follow this, it was evident. Her eyes had narrowed to small, bright, almost intelligent slits. After a time she said pensively:

"It might even have been Duncan. Hardly anyone likes Duncan. And that glass of water I drank in his room—"

"You went into Duncan's room after breakfast?"

"Yes. You see, he was drinking rather heavily last night. He said really dreadful things to everyone. Duncan gets so clever when he's drunk and I can hardly understand what he's talking about, but you could tell he was saying dreadful things from his expression."

"Yes. After breakfast this morning you went to his room. What for?"

Jane smiled patiently. "To wake him. He was to be an usher, you see. I thought I'd better take him some aspirin tablets. He gets the most horrid headaches. Duncan has a very nervous disposition so I think his headaches are migraine. It's always worse after he's been drinking, for some reason, and I did want him to be feeling all right for the wedding. So I went and got my bottle of aspirin tablets and took them into his room."

"What time was that?"

"Miss Stevens went upstairs about ten minutes to nine," Prye said.

"Well, it must have taken about five minutes to get the aspirin, so that would make it *five* minutes to nine," Jane said with an air of triumph. "But when I got there you'd never guess whom I saw coming out of Duncan's room!"

"All right," Prye said. "Who?"

Jane turned to Sands. "Do you give up too, Inspector?"

"Yes, I give up," Sands said.

"Well," Jane said, "it was *Dinah*. I never was so surprised in my life, because Duncan and Dinah can't stand each other. And when I got inside the room I was quite shocked because Duncan was still sleeping and Dinah had had her pajamas on. I didn't know *what* to think."

She knew what to think, Sands decided, and she thought it. Aloud he said: "Isn't there a possibility that she had just gone in to awaken him?"

Jane's eyes widened. "I never thought of that. It's a *possibility*, of course."

"Did she know you had seen her?"

"Oh yes. I said good morning to her. She said good morning and went down the hall into her own room. She wasn't in the least flustered, but then Dinah never is, really. She pretends she is sometimes, just to—just for excitement."

"Did you wake your brother?" Sands prompted.

"I shook him and shouted to him, but he wouldn't wake up. The only thing that ever wakens Duncan is cold water. There was a pitcher of it half full on his night table, so I poured out a glass and let it trickle out on his forehead." She giggled. "Oh, he was terribly mad!"

"You mentioned taking a drink of water yourself," Sands said.

"Yes, I did. Somehow, I could still taste that frightful bacon. There was a little water left in the pitcher so I drank some of it."

"How did it taste?"

Jane wrinkled her nose. "Well, it tasted funny, but I thought that was because it was Duncan's water."

"Duncan's water?" Sands repeated. "I see. He even had special water to drink?"

"Well, not exactly. It's the same water, but Duncan never drinks anything that isn't room temperature. He thinks all these hot and cold drinks that people take cause stomach ulcers. Even his cocktails have to be lukewarm."

Sands interrupted, "So that the pitcher was left standing in his room all night to make the water room temperature?"

JANE NODDED. "Yes, because when Duncan has migraine he is awfully thirsty in the mornings. He was very angry with me for drinking his water so I went downstairs to the kitchen to get him some. I mixed a little hot water with the cold."

"Why didn't you ring for Jackson or Hilda?"

"Duncan told me not to. Duncan says the only way he can teach me these things is to let me learn from experience. He said I must reap what I sow, and if I drink someone else's water I have to replace it." She sighed, rubbing her fingers across her white forehead. "Duncan is awfully clever."

"Duncan," Prye mumbled to the window, "is a pain in the pants."

But Jane was paying no attention. She was talking again, assuring Sands that she felt the whole thing was a Ghastly Mistake, that she felt perfectly well and wanted to go home, or at least as far as Nora's house. She even called him Doctor.

A commotion in the hall outside the room caused her to stop abruptly. She sat up in bed. "That's Duncan, I bet."

The door opened gradually and hospital sounds filled the room, the rattle of dishes and silver, the sigh of starched uniforms, the steady buzz of professional whispers, the brisk tap, tap, tap of rubber-soled shoes.

One whisper raised its head above the crowd.

"I'm afraid you can't, Mrs. Revel," it said. "We have orders not to—"

"The hell with orders," declared a hoarse voice from the hall. "The hell with everyone! I wanna see Janie—"

"But the doctor left orders—"

"The hell with orders," the hoarse voice repeated.

She came into the room with slow, unsteady steps and leaned against the wall, surveying the three of them out of glassy, half-closed eyes.

"Wow, a party!" she said.

She couldn't be any drunker, Prye thought. She still wore her yellow bridesmaid's dress and the hat of fresh marigolds. The dress was torn at the hem and the hat had slipped down over one eye. Some of the marigolds had come loose and straggled down to lose themselves in her flaming hair. She had a man's coat draped over her shoulders. It was made of shiny blue serge and was slightly dirty.

Her eyes focused themselves gradually on Inspector Sands.

"Doctor," she said thickly, "I'm a sick woman. I need a drink."

"Dinah!" Jane said with infinite reproach.

Reproach for what? Prye asked himself. For being drunk? For going into Duncan's room? For coming to the hospital?

The point was cleared up immediately.

"You've torn your beautiful dress," Jane said sadly.

"On the other hand," Dinah said, "you're cute. You look like a flower in that big bed, a little, fragile flower, a hepa—a hepa—hep—"

"Hepatica," Prye said.

"That's right," Dinah said. "Doesn't she? But, boys, if you only knew what I know. Boys, I could tell you things that I know."

"Have a chair, Dinah," Prye said. He took her arm and guided her to a chair. She sat down with great dignity, holding her neck very straight. The hat slid down her forehead and rolled off.

Prye said, "Dinah, this is Inspector Sands. Mrs. Revel, Inspector."

"Glad to meet you," Dinah said, extending her hand vaguely. "Any friend of Janie's is a friend of mine. You bet. Trouble is, any friend of mine is a friend of Janie's. Jane, you little hep—"

"Hepatica," Prye said.

"Tell the boys if it ain't so, Janie. Go on and tell the boys."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Dinah," Jane said in an injured voice. "Unless you're referring to Mr. Williams and his kindness in taking something out of my eye last night."

"Isn't she cute, boys?" Dinah demanded. "Didn't I tell you she was cute? Smart as a whip too. Caught on right away. Mr. Williams it is, Janie. Mr. Williams fixed your eye and I fixed his. I fixed his better than he fixed yours."

SANDS EDGED quietly toward the door. "Excuse me," he said softly. "I shall see you later, Mrs. Revel. I've got to phone now."

"Yeah," Dinah said, watching the door close behind him. "He's got to see a phone about a dog. Who is that man?"

"A policeman," Prye said.

Dinah yelped, "Wow! I'm crazy about policemen. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You're so noisy, Dinah," Jane said. She turned plaintively to Prye. "I wish you'd take Dinah home, Paul, and look after her. She's quite impossible when she's drunk. She imagines things."

Dinah shook her head owlishly. "Isn't she the limit, boys? But you don't know the half of it, boys. Tell 'em the other half, Janie."

Prye said, "Shall we go home, Dinah?"

"Go on, Janie. Give, Janie."

Jane sat up straight in the bed, her blond curls falling over her shoulders. "Honestly, Dinah, I had something in my eye and I asked Dennis to get it out for me

and he said he would. That's all there was to it. My conscience is quite clear."

"Clear like ink," Dinah said. "If Dennis was getting something out of your eye, why the hell was he kissing the back of your neck? Why the hell would that be, Paul?"

Prye didn't answer, and she turned back to Jane. "All right, you tell me, Janie. Why the hell would that be?"

"If he was kissing the back of my neck," Janie said virtuously, "it was without my consent and you really oughtn't to blame me, Dinah. He might have— He might be One of Those Men."

Dinah howled and leaned her head back against the chair. She seemed to be shaking with laughter. She sat up again in a minute and said, "Dennis is one of those men and you're one of those girls. The kisser and the kissed."

Jane raised her head and said to Prye in very dignified tones:

"I'm afraid Dinah is jealous. She's one of these possessive women. Honestly, I feel *sorry* for her. I wish you'd take her home."

"Home," Dinah said, "is where the drinks are. Come on, Paul."

"Delighted," Prye said with feeling.

He went over, picked up her marigold hat from the floor, and helped her to her feet. She swayed back and forth and gradually became steadier. She was clutching the blue serge coat in one hand.

Prye said, "Where did you get the coat? We'll take it back."

"Stole it," she said cheerfully. "Cannot take it back. Cannot smirch the family scutcheon." She paused at the foot of the bed and waved her free arm at Jane. "Good-by, my little hepatica. I hope you croak."

"Good-by, Dinah," Jane said sweetly. "I know you don't mean what you say when you're drunk."

"The hell I don't," Dinah said.

Prye guided her out, a firm hand on her arm. In the corridor she stopped and freed her arm. "I forgot something."

She went back into Jane's room. There was the sound of a sharp, heavy slap and a scream. Dinah reappeared in the corridor, looking very pleased.

"Gotta keep score," she said. "That's two."

They took the elevator down to the first floor. At the desk a nurse informed Prye that Inspector Sands had left the hospital twenty minutes previously and could be found at 197 River Road, Humber 5563.

Prye had driven to the hospital in Sands' car. Now he called a taxi and sat down on a couch in the waiting room beside Dinah. She was becoming very sleepy. He told her jokes to keep her awake, but after giggling impartially at all of them she went to sleep anyway, using her hat as a pillow.

When the taximan arrived he said, "Invalid, sir?"

"At the moment," Prye said. "Dinah. Dinah, wake up! We're going home to see Dennis."

Dinah stirred and sighed, "Oh, Dennis."

They carried her out between them and put her in the back seat of the taxi.

The driver sniffed the air. "A souse?"

"Somewhat," Prye said. "River Road, 197, as fast as possible."

HE HELD Dinah up with one hand and maneuvered a cigarette out of his pocket with the other. He couldn't strike the safety match in that position so he let go of Dinah and lit his cigarette, and she sagged forward until her head touched her knees. He put his arm around her, and she slept against his shoulder for the rest of the trip.

The driver turned off on River Road and pulled up in front of the Shanes' house. Prye handed him three dollars.

"You'd better help me move the invalid."

The driver eased Dinah out of the back seat and propped her up on the running board.

"Want me to sober her up a bit?" he asked Prye. "Just so's she can walk in the house?"

"Just so's," Prye said. "It's another buck for you."

The driver supported Dinah by draping her over his left arm and with his right he gave her a smart whack on the rear. She let out a yell and straightened up, hanging on to the door of the car.

"I'm shot," she said. "I'm shot."

Prye dispensed another dollar. "Pretty," he said. "There are certain advantages in not being a gentleman."

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"You bet," the driver agreed, and climbed back into his car.

Dinah made the front steps nicely. Prye rang the bell, and Jackson appeared. When he saw Dinah he began to grin.

"You lovely boy," Dinah said. "Could you spare a drink? I've been shot."

"I don't know how you old Harvard men react to such a situation," Prye said. "But I hope you're the executive type who'll take over."

"I've taken over before, sir," Jackson said. He offered his arm to Dinah and she took it with a delighted smile. "Shall I escort you upstairs, Mrs. Revel?"

"Isn't he gallant?" she asked Prye. "He doesn't maul me the way you did, Paul." Her blue eyes filled.

Jackson led her upstairs. Dinah's voice floated down: "Honestly, Jackson, you'd never guess what Paul did to me! You'd never guess!"

"I'm a good guesser," Jackson said, flinging an evil grin down at Prye.

"He hit me on the unmentionable," Dinah said with dignity.

A couple of doors slammed upstairs and soon Jackson reappeared in the hall.

"I left Mrs. Revel with Miss Shane," he told Prye.

"Fine," Prye said coldly. "Fine. Was she telling Nora—was she talking about—?"

"Oh, yes sir," Jackson said. "She was quite aggrieved at your little—ah, lapse. The rest of the family are in the drawing room, sir. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thanks," Prye said bitterly. "You've done more than I considered humanly possible."

He turned and went toward the drawing room. The opening of the door let out a babble of voices.

Mrs. Shane was occupying the center of the floor. One hand was raised and her mouth was open, as if Prye's entrance had interrupted her in the middle of an emphatic sentence. She rustled toward him immediately.

"Come in, Paul. We are having a council of war."

"About the poisoning?"

Mrs. Shane was reproachful. "Of course not. That's the inspector's job. This is about the wedding presents"

Prye gave Dennis Williams a cool nod, Aspasia a smile, and strolled over to the fireplace.

"Personally," he said, "I have no use for fifteen coffee tables so I suggest returning fourteen of them. Use the same principle throughout."

Aspasia was watching him with her small, malignant eyes narrowed. She was sitting in a corner of the room in a chair much too big for her. Her feet didn't quite reach the floor though she held them stiff and straight as if they did. She was nearly sixty, very dainty and neat to the top of her soft white hair. She reminded Prye of Jane until he met her eyes. They were not Jane's vacuously pretty eyes, they were old and bitter and cold eyes.

"Dr. Prye chooses to jest," she said. Her voice was soft and sibilant like a lady librarian's.

MRS. SHANE said, "Dennis thinks, and I agree, that you should retain the presents and have the wedding as soon as possible, say on Monday. Jane must be perfectly well again. The hospital phoned to say she's coming home tonight. Let's hope she does."

Aspasia said in her genteel whisper, "The hospitals are overcrowded. They are turning people out before they should. She may die."

"You are being clairvoyant again, Aspasia," Mrs. Shane said coldly.

"I am sensitive to atmosphere. It is foolish to plan weddings in an atmosphere of death."

"She *isn't* dead, Aspasia."

"No?" Her voice trailed upward into a question mark.

Prye went over to Dennis and said in an undertone. "Dinah's back. Soused."

Dennis smiled. "I thought she would be. Any word of Duncan?"

"No."

"He'll be soused, too. It's epidemic. The police are looking for him."

Prye said, "What for?"

"Something about a pitcher of water," Dennis said thoughtfully. "Jackson told me."

Prye turned to go out again. He glanced at Aspasia and stopped. She was staring at the window over his shoulder.

"That bird," she said in a choked whisper.

Prye looked around and saw that a small black bird was perching on the window ledge. "Looks like a starling," he said.

"They're pests," Mrs. Shane said. "Thousands of them in this district."

"What is it doing on the window?" Aspasia was still staring at it. The bird tapped its beak against the pane with a quick, insolent movement.

Dennis mumbled, "What in hell *do* birds do on windows?"

"It is a raven," Aspasia said.

"Nonsense," her sister replied brusquely.

"It is a raven, I say!" Aspasia's voice was shriller, and a flush was spreading over her face, curiously uneven, like pink paint spilling out of a can. "And Duncan is here now."

"Maybe it's a bat and Duncan is a vampire," Dennis said.

The bird twisted its neck impudently, tapped the pane again with its beak, and hopped away.

"Strange little creature," Mrs. Shane said, smiling.

"Strange," Aspasia repeated dully. "Yes, it is strange. I must tell Duncan; warn him."

"What on earth—?"

Aspasia waved her sister to silence and turned to Prye. "Nora tells me you are literate, Dr. Prye. Perhaps you know what happened to another Duncan—"

Prye wanted to laugh. She looked like a vindictive little elf. "This isn't one of my literate days," he said.

"The raven himself is hoarse

*That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements."*

The smile froze on Dennis' face. He strode over to her and grasped Aspasia's shoulder.

"So you know," he whispered. "So you know."

Aspasia slipped out of his grasp and crumpled on the floor. Dennis stared down at her for a moment, then walked toward the door with the strange, lumbering gait of a spider.

Prye was too surprised to stop him. Mrs. Shane was bending over Aspasia, patting her wrists and telling her in an

exasperated voice not to be a fool, that the damn bird was only a starling. She straightened up in a minute and met Prye's eyes.

"This is the first time anyone has taken Aspasia's predictions seriously," she said dryly. "I don't wonder it was a shock. Fetch the smelling salts, will you?"

IV

AS PASIA PASSED from a coma into hysterics without going through an intermediate stage which would permit questioning. Aspasia's hysterics, like everything else about her, were subdued and ladylike so that no one in the house was aware of the scene in the drawing room except those who were there.

Dennis Williams had shut himself up in his room on the third floor and refused to admit Prye or Mrs. Shane. They went downstairs again, Prye frowning, Mrs. Shane still calm but annoyed with Dennis.

"Of course, Aspasia's prediction—if it was a prediction—was sheer accident," she said briskly. "It has no bearing on the poisoning."

Prye said nothing.

Her voice became a little sharper. "Paul, you surely don't believe in this telepathy nonsense?"

"I wouldn't classify it as nonsense," Prye said. "I haven't experienced the phenomenon myself but others have. The inexplicable isn't the impossible."

"Aspasia's been predicting disaster for forty years. I don't begrudge her being right once," Mrs. Shane said dryly. "One could hardly do worse, the laws of chance being what they are."

"Chance," Prye said, "is one explanation. Another is that Aspasia really knows something or guesses something about the poisoning and about Duncan. I hope you'll change your mind about telling Inspector Sands."

"I have nothing to hide. If you think it's best, tell him. But make it clear that he is not to bother Aspasia about it. I'm sure no one was as surprised as Aspasia herself."

"Except Dennis," Prye said. "Dennis, I thought, seemed *very* surprised."

He opened the door of the drawing room and she went in. He remained standing

in the hall. He looked down at his shoes.

"And just who is Dennis?" he asked.

Mrs. Shane turned and regarded him bleakly. "Who is anybody, for that matter? He's a young man whom I rather dislike; he's going to marry my niece; he seems to have enough money. And even if he hasn't, Dinah has."

"But he's your guest, isn't he?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Of course. I enjoy having people around me. But I don't ask them for their registration cards. Dinah wanted an invitation for the young man and I sent one. She is—"

She stopped suddenly as the door of the room across the hall opened and Hilda catapulted out toward the kitchen. The inspector materialized in the doorway.

"Oh, Mrs. Shane," he said softly. "Would you mind answering another question?"

Her smile was gracious and friendly as she walked toward him. "Of course not."

"Your daughter tells me you use eye-drops," Sands said. "May I see them please?"

"You may certainly. I haven't used them for some time. They're in the bathroom between my room and my sister's."

"No," Sands said, "they're not. Your daughter thought you kept them there and I looked for them. You have no further information to give me?"

"Why?" She turned to Prye. "Why *eyedrops*?"

Prye gave her a wry smile. "Why anything for that matter? But I suspect it's because the lab analyzed Duncan's pillowcase and sheet and found traces of atropine."

Sands silenced him with a small movement of his hand.

"What has Duncan's pillowcase to do with my eyedrops or Jane's poisoning?" Mrs. Shane demanded.

"It seems obvious," Sands said, "that Duncan was the intended victim. His sister drank some of the water that was in the pitcher beside his bed. I'd like to find this Duncan."

"Why?" Mrs. Shane said again.

The inspector smiled gently. "To prevent him from being murdered."

Mrs. Shane made a queer sound in her throat, walked back into the drawing room, and shut the door firmly behind her.

Sands looked at Prye, half smiling. "How did Duncan behave when he saw his sister collapse in the church? Was he puzzled, anxious, frightened?"

"Frightened," Prye said.

"Interesting. There is a possibility then that he realized she had gotten the poison intended for him and that he has gone into hiding to protect himself. How does atropine taste?"

"Pure atropine is slightly bitter. It depends on the solution whether the taste would be noticeable."

"The amount of muscarin used as an antidote was about one fiftieth of a grain. The doctor guessed at the amount, but it must have been a close guess. Miss Stevens is recovering rapidly. So we can estimate one fiftieth of a grain of atropine as the amount she took."

Prye frowned. "Not nearly a lethal dose. Have you phoned Mrs. Shane's doctor and found out how many grains of atropine were in the eyedrops?"

"One twentieth," Sands said.

"Still not enough, under the circumstances."

"The circumstances being that when the poison took effect he would be surrounded by people who would get him to a hospital? You're sure that one twentieth of a grain wouldn't have killed him?"

"No, I'm not," Prye said. "But I think it's unlikely. Duncan is still young—people become progressively more intolerant to atropine as they grow older—and his physical condition is good. Aside from his drinking habits he takes extremely good care of himself. Suppose the poison was intended to give him a really fine *scare*."

Sands studied the ceiling. "The scare theory would account for one thing which has been worrying me, the anonymous telephone call. The prisoner intended to scare Duncan, poisoned Jane by mistake, and phoned the hospital to make sure that the poison was identified and the proper antidote administered."

Sands went into the library and came back carrying his hat and topcoat. Prye followed him to the door.

"One more point," he said. "One twentieth grain of atropine in that pitcher of water would have only a slightly bitter taste. But a bottle of eyedrops is a different matter. The antiseptic alone would

flavor the water strongly, I think."

"Miss Stevens mentioned the flavor," Sands remarked. "But Duncan, in hang-over condition, would perhaps not have noticed anything. The poisoner probably depended on the morning-after taste. By the way, what time do you dine here?"

"Seven."

"If Duncan Stevens appears let me know immediately."

He was putting on his gray topcoat when Nora came running down the stairs.

"Inspector!" she called. "Wait."

SANDS watched her approach, calm, unsurprised. Women, he thought, have good memories. They keep adding to their stories until they're almost complete. He said, "You've thought of something else?"

Nora passed Prye with a cold stare and smiled at the inspector.

"It just occurred to me. Jane is coming home before dinner so she couldn't have had very much poison. And Duncan is still missing."

The inspector was patient. He was becoming accustomed to the tortuous ways by which the Shane family arrived at their points.

"Meaning?" he prompted.

"Meaning that Duncan might have poisoned her."

"Any one of us might have," Prye said. "Why Duncan?"

"To stop the wedding," Nora said sweetly. "You see, Duncan asked me to marry him last night."

Prye said, "Phew!" and let out his breath. "Rather tardy, wasn't it?"

"He'd asked me before, several times. I always said no." She looked distantly at Prye. "I have since wondered if I wasn't a little hasty. Duncan has his faults but he doesn't maltreat defenseless women."

"I didn't touch Dinah," Prye said violently.

"Gorilla."

"It was the taxi driver."

"I suggest," Sands interrupted mildly, "that you settle the gorilla question after I've gone. While we're on the subject, however, is Mr. Dennis Williams' black eye a result of—ah, the machinations of Mrs. Revel?"

Prye grinned. "Oh yes. And speaking

of Dennis, I can tell you something—"

"Yes?" The inspector's voice was alert.

Prye related the scene in the drawing room, Aspasia's prediction of disaster, and Dennis' subsequent behavior.

"Keep an eye on Williams," Sands said, frowning. "I have a murder case on the books right now and can't stay myself." He buttoned his coat and put on his gray fedora.

They watched him go down the stone steps of the veranda and walk along the flagstones to his black sedan, his shoulders hunched against the raw autumn wind.

Nora shivered and closed the door. "I wonder where Duncan is. He shouldn't stay away like this."

ONLY one man in the world knew where Duncan was. He was a colored redcap at the Union Station. He didn't come forward at the inquest to give his evidence because it might have cost him his job. But later he told his wife about it.

About four o'clock in the afternoon George Brown went down to the basement of the station. George was getting too old for his job, and he knew of a small storage room where he could go for a nap between trains.

Halfway down the stairs he caught sight of a man at the bottom. He was quite a young man, rather short and fat, and he wore a silk hat and striped pants and a wilted carnation in the buttonhole of his coat. In one hand he carried an imitation-leather knitting bag. With the other he clung to the brass railing of the stairs.

George classified him instantly as a big tip and hurried down to take the knitting bag from his hand. But the young man turned out to be very drunk, and with the tenacity of the very drunk he clutched the bag with both hands.

George said, "Taking a train, sir?"

Duncan focused his eyes with an effort on the redcap.

"I am on a mission," he said gravely. "I am on a great and important mission."

"Yes sir," George said. "Taking a train?"

Duncan thought for a minute. "Possibly, Rastus, possibly I shall get into a train and ride into the sunset."

There's no big tip here, George thought, and turned to go away. But the young

man put a hand on his shoulder and held him back.

"See this bag, Rastus?"

"Yes sir," George said.

"Guess what's in it."

"A bottle, sir."

"You're getting warm, Rastus, you're getting warm. Try again."

"Two bottles, sir?"

Duncan let out a howl of delight. "Psychic! You niggers are all psychic. Two bottles. One for you, one for me."

"Never touch it, sir," George said.

"I'm going to drink my bottle, Rastus. Take yours home to the wife and kiddies. But I'm going to drink mine right here. I'm going to get boiled and then I'm going to lie down on the tracks and go to sleep."

"You can't get up to the tracks without a ticket."

Duncan fumbled in his vest pocket and brought out a ticket.

"Got you there, Rastus. I have a ticket. A ticket to"—he peered down at the card in his hand—"to Mimico."

George reached for the ticket. "Better let me keep it for you, sir. That train pulls out in twenty minutes."

"I said I was going to lie down on the tracks, Rastus. I said it and I meant it."

"What's your name, sir?"

Duncan leaned forward, grabbing George's coat by the sleeve. George got an overpowering scent of whisky.

"My name," Duncan said, "is Aram."

"Aram what, sir?"

"Just Aram."

Ten minutes had been wasted. George disentangled his coat sleeve. "Sorry, sir, this is my time off. Come along if you want to. You can sober up."

When they got inside the small storage room George pulled a crate over against the door. Duncan sat down on the floor with the knitting bag on his lap, and George sat down beside him. They both looked tired and a little sad.

"You see, Rastus," Duncan said, "if anyone wants to murder you, you've got to take steps. You've got to foil them."

"Yes sir," George said. "Certainly do."

"And the best way to foil them is to murder yourself first. Take it from me, Rastus."

"That would only do them a favor, sir," George said wearily.

Duncan smiled craftily, wagging his forefinger under George's nose. "We shall see. We shall see."

He's drunker than I thought, George decided. He's drunk enough to do it. I'll have to take away his ticket. I'll have to find out who he is and send him home. Maybe I'll get a reward.

"Is somebody going to murder you, sir?"

"No," Duncan said. "I'm foiling them."

He's one of these swells with a lot of money, George thought, and he thinks everyone is trying to get it away from him.

"Better give me your ticket, sir," he said.

"Rastus, you're a nagger," Duncan said. "I've got a sister like you, Rastus, a nagger. She's going to get the surprise of her life. Want to do me a favor, Rastus?"

"No sir. This is my time off."

"After the train goes past and I am a battered, bloody pulp, you go and tell my sister that I think—that I thought, that is—that she's a nagger. You do that, Rastus. I've got fifty dollars that wants you to do that."

"What's your sister's name, sir?"

"Jane. That's her name," Duncan said.

"Jane what, sir?"

"Aram. Jane Aram." Duncan laughed, tears rolling down his cheeks and dripping onto the knitting bag.

"Better give me your ticket," George said again. "We don't want any trouble at the station."

Duncan had stopped laughing and his face looked suddenly ugly. "Hands off me, nigger."

BUT GEORGE already had his hand in Duncan's vest pocket and had hold of the ticket. He brought it out. Duncan made a grab for it and George hit him on the point of the chin. He hadn't meant to hit him, but he did. Duncan slumped sideways and his silk hat rolled off into a pile of sawdust.

He'll sleep it off now, George thought uneasily. I better find out who he is.

He went through all of Duncan's pockets. There were no letters, no registration card, not even a driver's license. But the silk handkerchief had "D.S." embroidered in one corner.

So his name isn't Aram, George thought.

He just made that up. George frowned.

The knitting bag was lying between Duncan's legs. George opened it and found two bottles of scotch. There was also a gun, a small pearl-handled gun with "D.S." engraved on the handle.

George took the gun out carefully. It was heavier than it looked. Maybe it was loaded. He put the gun in Duncan's pocket, peeled a five off the roll of bills he'd found, and closed the knitting bag. Then he slid the crate away from the door and went out, holding the bag under his arm as inconspicuously as he could. Nobody noticed him.

Shortly before seven o'clock Miss Jane Stevens was being assisted into Nora's coupé by a nurse. Nora had brought along Jane's clothes, a soft blue wool dress, a scarf to tie over her head, her mink coat.

Jane huddled in the seat and thanked the nurse with a wan smile. She was very pale and there were blue shadows under her eyes and a faint bruise on one cheek. She leaned back with her eyes closed.

Nora glanced at her sharply. The child looked really ill. She shouldn't be allowed to go home.

"Janie," she said, "wouldn't it be better if you stayed at the hospital for another day?"

Without any warning Jane burst into tears, not her usual facile tears but deep sobs that shook the seat of the car. Nora let her cry, watching her quietly. The sobs went on, interspersed with broken words: "Duncan—all alone—cares at all."

She cried nearly all the way home, wiping the tears away with the blue scarf. But by the time she entered the house Jane had composed herself somewhat. She stood in the doorway of the drawing room, clutching the knob as if she were too feeble to stand alone. Her smile was very, very brave.

"You were terribly sweet to wait dinner for me. I could have managed."

Dinah groaned aloud and finished off her cocktail.

Jane suffered the perfunctory embrace of Mrs. Shane and the warm one of Aspasia. Dennis Williams said, "Hello," in an embarrassed voice.

Jane noticed his eye and gave a little cry, "Dennis, you've been hurt, too!"

There was an adroit accent on the "too"

which, Prye decided, was meant to imply that Dinah was responsible for both incidents.

Dinah refused to take the bait. She got up, yawning. "The corpse has arrived. So let's eat."

Jane opened her mouth to reply, but Mrs. Shane grasped her firmly by the arm and propelled her toward the dining room, murmuring soothing sentences. "So glad you're all right again. We were all worried to death. No, my dear, you're not to think about Duncan. I'm quite sure he's off just getting quietly drunk." She went on talking while the rest filed into the dining room and sat down.

To her intense annoyance, Aspasia found herself sitting beside Dennis Williams. She did the best she could under the circumstances. She kept her head turned to the person on her other side, like a robin studying a worm. It was unfortunate that the worm she was to study turned out to be Dinah. Aspasia violently disapproved of Dinah.

Dennis was no less uncomfortable but the thought of his bags already packed and three strong cocktails had improved his state of mind.

She doesn't know anything, he thought. She was guessing. I was a fool to pay any attention to her.

HE SMILED rather sheepishly at Mrs. Shane and said, "Afraid I'll have to pull out tomorrow morning, Mrs. Shane. Business, you know. It's been awfully good of you to have me—"

"Dennis!" Dinah's voice was sharp.

He looked past Aspasia at Dinah, sitting bolt upright in her chair staring at him.

"But I told you, Dinah. I have to get back to the office. I'm a workingman."

Jane smiled sweetly across the table. "Of course. We understand even if Dinah doesn't. I don't think Dinah is feeling very well tonight. Perhaps she had a *wee droppie* too much this afternoon."

"I don't think any of us is feeling very well," Mrs. Shane said hastily. "It's the strain of having Jane poisoned on our hands, as it were."

Jane's smile faded. "Really, Aunt Jennifer, I think I have had most of the strain. I'm sorry I've put you all to so much trouble, but if you can't stand the

strain of poisoning people, *why did one of you poison me?*"

There was a short, grim silence broken finally by Dinah's dry voice:

"It's not impossible that someone may dislike you, my dear. It's not even impossible that you fixed yourself up a nice dose of poison—"

Jane began to weep. Jackson was coming in the door with a platter of meat and he stopped short, his eyes moving warily along the table and coming to rest at last on Jane.

"That's quite an accusation, Jane," Mrs. Shane said, "against your own relatives!"

"There are the servants, too," Dennis said, looking at Jackson. "Three of them."

Jackson looked at him woodenly. "The servants would have no object in poisoning Miss Stevens."

"We are not asking you to defend yourself, Jackson," Mrs. Shane said. She turned to Jane and patted her hand. "After all, there's no use in crying over spilt milk. As long as we're all together we shan't any of us get a chance to perform the dire deeds which would give Aspasia such satisfaction." She favored Aspasia with a cold glare and went on talking. "And since you've already been poisoned once, Jane, the laws of chance make it extremely unlikely that you'll be poisoned again."

"I don't think I want any dinner," Jane's voice was injured and reproachful.

"Wise girl," Dinah said approvingly. "I wouldn't depend on the laws of chance either if I were you."

Nora got up and went over to Jane. "You'd be better off upstairs, Jane."

Jane rose, clinging to Nora's arm, and they went out of the room. Aspasia resumed her robin pose, its effect marred somewhat by a series of nervous hiccoughs.

Prye leaned over and whispered to Mrs. Shane. She nodded, dubiously, and he got up and stood behind his chair.

"Now that Jane has gone upstairs," he said, "I can speak frankly to you. It's fairly unlikely that a perfect stranger could walk into the house and poison the pitcher of water that was intended for Duncan."

Aspasia's head jerked to the front. "Then it really was—then Duncan was the one—"

"The inspector thinks so, and I agree," Prye said.

"Not guilty," Dennis said loudly. "I wouldn't have any object in doing—"

Dinah said, "Be quiet, Dennis," in a warning voice.

"Why should I be quiet?" Dennis demanded. "I didn't do it. I know everyone will blame me. I'm the only one who's not a member of this precious family of yours."

Mrs. Shane said, smiling, "That's quite beside the point, Dennis. Go on, Paul."

Prye went on.

"Sands thinks that the poison may have been intended to warn or frighten Duncan. If any of you did this, I suggest an immediate confession to Sands. I'm sure Duncan and Jane would not prosecute."

"Ha ha," Dinah said. "Duncan would send his own grandmother to the chair for stealing a safety pin."

Prye frowned at her. "You're being helpful, Dinah."

"Well, don't try kidding us. No one will admit anything. We all know that Duncan is the most vindictive man who ever lived. And I know there isn't one of us who'd be sorry if he forgot to come back—"

DUNCAN thought he was dead. He was in hell, of course. He always knew he'd go to hell when he died and here he was, and the devil was tapping his head smartly with a hammer. Once he struck Duncan's chin by mistake so it hurt there, too. Duncan said, "Hey!" but this didn't seem to frighten the devil at all. The hammering went on.

He opened one eye tentatively and discovered that he was blind.

Possibly, Duncan thought, my eyes have been plucked out. Maybe they do it to everyone down here or maybe I'm a special case. I wish I knew whether I was a special case or not, it would make it easier for me to know how to act. But I don't know. I'll have to be very casual until I find out. There is plenty of time. I'm going to be here forever and ever and ever—

"Stop that hammering!" Duncan shouted, not casually at all.

He hadn't moved yet except for one eyelid. Now his hand slowly came to his head and found his eyes. He had two eyes

anyway, and a hand. Then his leg twitched and he had a leg and another leg, and pretty soon he was all there, right down to the silk hat and the carnation.

So I'm all there.

All where? What is this place? Has it any time, and if it has what is the time? And who is this man who is all there in this place that has no time?

I am Duncan Stevens.

I am a short, powerful young man with some shares of International Paper.

How many shares of International Paper?

Two hundred.

Then you must be Duncan Stevens?

Yes, I am. I am Duncan Stevens, a short, powerful young man with a silk hat.

This seemed very satisfactory. Duncan propped himself on one elbow to survey the place that had no time. He was probably the only man who would ever see it. When he had seen it he would go and tell Mr. Einstein about it, he would win the Nobel prize, he would have his picture in the *Christian Herald*, and the devil would never dare lay hands on him.

He struck a match.

The room was filled with shapes, precise, geometrical shapes. They looked like boxes.

The watch went out. So mathematics is at the bottom of everything, after all. I don't dare tell anyone this. It will revolutionize the revolution. I will be burned as a witch. I will go home, and I will never tell anyone anything about this place.

He lit another match and found the door.

There were lights in the corridor outside, strong lights, and a clock. The clock said twelve-thirty.

Duncan was very sad about this. He stood in the corridor blinking at the lights and thinking of the other place with no lights and no time.

He went up the marble steps, clinging to the railing. At the top of the stairs a man came up and asked him if he wanted a cab. He followed the man without protest.

All the way home he crouched in the back seat of the taxi, his eyes closed, thinking of the other place. When the taxi stopped he opened his eyes and saw that the Shane house was dark. He gave

the driver a bill and got out.

Someone had left the door unlocked for him. He opened it quietly. He didn't want to waken anyone, to meet anyone. He wanted to think. He seemed to be thinking very well tonight. . . .

But he hadn't his picture in the *Christian Herald* in time. The devil was at his head again, taking his vengeance. There were only two taps but they were hard.

They cracked Duncan's skull.

V

THERE HAD been frost during the night. The trees were mottled with silver and the grass lay smothered and gray with death.

The milkman shivered as he swung off his truck and up the driveway to the tune of clanking bottles. Soon it would be winter, he thought, and the raw winds would be blowing from Lake Ontario, and the milk would freeze and push out the top of the bottle like a growing plant.

Yes, it was a hard life. His step had slowed; he seemed to be already fighting his way through snow. He put out his hand to brush away some of the hoar-frost from the cedar hedge that lined the driveway. Under the warmth of his hand the frost melted and disappeared. The gesture made him feel better. It was as if he had done his bit to stop the approach of winter.

Then through the hedge he saw Duncan lying at the bottom of the steps.

He set down his wire basket of bottles with a sharp clank, parted the hedge, and crawled through it. His hands were scratched, but he didn't notice the scratches because the young man with his head resting on a flagstone seemed to be dead.

It required only a touch of that rigid, outstretched hand to convince the milkman that Duncan was dead.

He's fallen, the milkman thought, and he couldn't get up so he froze to death. No, he can't have frozen, it isn't winter yet. But he does look frozen.

Duncan's hair was silvered by the frost. His black coat had turned to rich gray plush and the tips of his eyelashes were pointed with diamonds.

The milkman crouched and touched him again.

Why, he looks like someone carved him out of silver and scattered a few rubies around for good measure.

Oh hell, thought the milkman, standing up again, I got too much imagination.

He went up the steps and rang the bell. The discovery had excited him, had warmed him. Beside the coldness of death he felt very quick and alive; his limbs had become very flexible.

The bell pealed again, and soon Jackson, an old bathrobe flung over his pajamas, opened the door and came out. His eyes squinted through vestigial sleep.

"There's a dead man out here," the milkman said. The warmth born out of the contrast with cold had affected even his voice.

But Jackson had already seen for himself. He still had his hand on the doorknob and he gripped it a little more tightly.

"Does he belong here?" the milkman said.

"You'd better come inside," Jackson said, "while I phone the police."

"I got my rounds to make. I got to be finished at nine o'clock."

"What's your name?"

"James Harrison, Goldenrod Dairy, number fifty-five. If you think I should stick around maybe I could get my brother-in-law—"

"As long as I have your name," Jackson said. "The police may want to get in touch with you."

"Well, that's my name all right, James Harrison, number fifty-five."

The door closed on Jackson. James Harrison took another look at Duncan, then he went through the hedge again and picked up his wire basket of milk bottles. The clock on the dashboard of his truck said six minutes past six.

"At approximately six o'clock," James Harrison said aloud, "I was making my usual rounds when I chanced to discover the deceased corpse at 197 River Road, one of my best customers. I sensed immediately that there was something wrong. . . ."

Jackson went into the library and phoned for Inspector Sands, then he sat for a while, shivering under his bathrobe, not thinking anything at all. Afterward he went back to his room on the third floor.

He paused on the landing of the second floor but he heard no one stirring. They

were all as quiet in sleep as Duncan was in death. Jackson thought, I am the only one in the house who's really alive.

HE WAS lonely and a little frightened. On the third floor he let his step grow heavy and whistled a bar of music to make someone come alive. In his room he changed into his black trousers and tie and put on a fresh linen coat. Someone moved in the next room. There were the creak of bedsprings and a short, hoarse cough.

Through the wall he heard Dennis Williams heave a long-drawn-out sigh. He must be looking at the clock, Jackson thought, and seeing how early it is.

He went out into the hall and rapped on Dennis' door.

"Come in," Dennis said thickly.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed holding the clock in his hands. His face in the early light had a greenish tinge like old bronze. His black hair was ruffled and it looked thin and rather oily.

"Doesn't anyone sleep around here?" he demanded. "Is this damn clock right?"

"It's right, sir," Jackson said. "I'm sorry the bell awakened you. It rings in my room as well as in the kitchen."

"Who the hell goes around ringing bells at six o'clock in the morning?"

I don't like his tone, Jackson decided. I think I'll let him have it.

"The milkman rang the bell, sir. He found Mr. Stevens lying dead at the foot of the veranda steps."

Dennis didn't move at all. There was no sound in the room but the ticking of the clock and the breathing of two men who were rather angry.

"Well, that's as good a reason as any," Dennis said finally. "Duncan is really dead?"

"Oh, yes sir," Jackson said dryly.

"Have you notified the police?"

"Yes sir."

Dennis put the alarm clock back on the table with slow deliberation.

"Is Duncan—I mean—"

"It looks like an accident, sir. Will you have your breakfast now? I can wake Mrs. Hogan."

"Yes," Dennis said. "Wake Mrs. Hogan."

By the time Jackson came downstairs

again Inspector Sands had arrived. He was standing in the hall with the front door open, examining the lock. He turned his head at the sound of Jackson's step and motioned to him to walk quietly.

Through the slit in the door Jackson could see four men. One of them had a camera and he was saying in a mild voice, "Get the hell out of the way, Bill. I don't want a picture of your feet."

They all seemed to know exactly what to do. Inspector Sands paid no attention to them.

"How do you lock this door at night, Jackson?" Sands asked.

"The self lock is kept on all the time," Jackson said. "We simply leave it like that at night."

Sands propped his notebook against the wall and wrote down the name and address of the milkman and the time of his arrival.

"The guests are still sleeping, sir," Jackson said, "except Mr. Williams. Shall I wake the others?"

The inspector shook his head and returned to his study of the door. He opened it wider to say: "Make it snappy, Tom. The sun's coming up fast."

The man with the camera nodded.

Jackson looked puzzled. "What's the sun got to do with it?"

Sands raised his head. "Frost," he said, enigmatically. "If you could make us a pot of coffee, Jackson, we'd be much obliged."

Jackson went out to the kitchen. Sands opened the front door wide.

The man with the camera said: "Done, and done prettily, Inspector. Do I develop them right away?"

"As soon as possible, Tom."

Tom departed with a blithe wave of his hand.

Sands went down the steps. "Well, Bill?" he said to the young man who was touching Duncan's skull with careful fingers.

DR. WILLIAM SUTTON, the coroner's assistant, straightened up and said, "Skull fracture. He landed with his head on this flagstone. As you can see, the flagstone has several sharp edges. What probably happened was this: he got to the top of the steps, lost his balance, and fell down backward."

"And falling down twelve stone steps would kill him?"

"Apparently," Sutton said. "He's dead. The only odd thing about it is the bruise on his chin. If he fell backward how could he have bruised his chin? If he fell forward he wouldn't normally have fallen in the position he's in now. Any reason to suspect murder?"

"An excellent reason."

"That's fine," Sutton said. "Makes the whole setup simpler. He was standing at the top of the steps, someone took a swing at his chin, and he fell down backward. If the swing was pretty terrific he might have missed most of the steps and landed at the bottom. If it wasn't, he'll have bruises and breaks on the rest of his body."

"Find that out," Sands said. "As soon as Joe has gone over his clothes, take him away."

The man called Joe was busy dusting the outside doorknob with aluminum powder. At the sound of his name he looked up and said sourly, "I can't go over his clothes for finger prints here. I'll need calcium sulphide for the suit and silver nitrate for the shirt and handkerchief."

"I know that," Sands said patiently. "I want you to collect the dust from his pocket before he's moved. The stuff on his hat looks like sawdust."

Interested, Joe came down the steps. "It is sawdust," he said.

"Where in hell would he get sawdust?" Sutton asked.

"From a planing mill," Joe said. "Maybe he's a lumber king."

For the next half-hour Joe worked carefully, brushing the sawdust into a sterile bottle with a tiny brush and the dust from Duncan's pockets into other bottles. He wore close-fitting cotton gloves.

Dr. Sutton was bored after ten minutes of this procedure and went inside to get his coffee. Jackson served him in the dining room with Dennis. Dennis asked a great many questions to which Sutton replied with polite disinterest: "I'm sure I don't know," or "I have no idea."

Dennis was annoyed. "I suppose you know whether he's dead or not?" he inquired acidly.

Sutton said, "Oh, he's dead all right."

"Do we have to get our information

from the newspapers?" Dennis growled.

Sutton grinned. "Not even there, Mr. Williams."

He finished his coffee, thanked Jackson, and strolled outside again. When Dennis followed him out five minutes later there was nothing to prove that the whole thing had not been a dream except the stains on the flagstone and the small gray-beige figure of Inspector Sands hunched over the table in the library.

The library door was open so Dennis went in.

Sands looked up. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Williams. Come in and close the door."

Dennis did. "Have they taken away the—the body?"

"Yes. Sit down."

"No, thanks. I'll stand."

"Nervous, Mr. Williams?"

Dennis sat down. "Why should I be nervous?"

"You had a quarrel with Mr. Stevens yesterday, perhaps."

"I did not."

"You have a black eye."

"Yes," Dennis said, smiling slightly, "but Duncan didn't give it to me. I scarcely knew him, so we had no reason to fight. The eye is a present from Mrs. Revel."

"You are, in fact, a stranger here except for your friendship with Mrs. Revel?"

"Not exactly," Dennis said. "I've been here before with Dinah. I knew Mrs. Shane and Nora and Miss O'Shaughnessy. The others I didn't meet until this week." He paused, jerking nervously at his tie. "As a matter of fact, I didn't want to come here in the first place. The wedding is a family affair. I feel like an interloper."

"Mrs. Revel wanted you to come?"

"Yes," Dennis said. "Now I suppose I'll have to stay."

SANDS shook his head. "Of course not. When you have made a complete signed statement you will be free to leave. Providing, naturally, that no evidence against you turns up. I presume you're anxious to get back to your business in Montreal?"

"I— Yes, I am."

"Just what is your business, Mr. Williams? I don't believe you told me that yesterday."

"Bonds."

"The address of your firm, please?"

"George Revel and Company, Rand Building."

"Is that any relation to Mrs. Revel?" Sands asked.

"Her husband," Dennis said stiffly. "Her former husband, I mean."

"Interesting."

"Yes, it's damn interesting. But it hasn't got anything to do with Duncan."

"Probably not."

From the room above and the hall outside came sounds of a house coming to life: footsteps and running water and now and then the bang of a door and the sound of voices.

Dennis was sitting on the edge of his chair, listening, his body tense. Sands' quiet voice startled him:

"I'm fond of *Macbeth*."

"I've never read it," Dennis said.

"But yesterday in the drawing room you were quite perturbed when Miss O'Shaughnessy predicted the death of Duncan."

"Death?" Dennis threw back his head and laughed. "I didn't know it meant a death. It just said, 'fatal entrance of Duncan!'"

"Go on."

"And I— Well, frankly, Duncan was a skunk. He threatened to tell George about Dinah and me. Naturally, I don't want that. I have to earn my living and I have a good job. George Revel would have fired me immediately if he'd found out. He's still in love with Dinah, I think."

"And so?"

"And so I thought Aspasia had found out that Duncan was going to tell, and that she was warning me that Duncan's entrance was fatal *for me*."

Sands leaned back, smiling. A plausible young man, he decided, of the genus natural liar. "I understand," he said aloud. "Now if you'd like to bring Mrs. Shane and her daughter and Miss Stevens in here, I'll break the news to them. Better bring Dr. Prye, too, in case Miss Stevens takes it badly."

Dennis got up, his face paling. "I'd forgotten about Jane. She'll be—"

Sands spoke soothingly. "Miss Stevens hasn't a sensitive, nervous temperament. She will absorb the shock nicely, I think."

Dennis hesitated, then swung around

and went out. He looked angry, the inspector noticed with some surprise.

While he was waiting, he put through two telephone calls. The first was to headquarters asking that Sergeant Bannister and a stenographer be sent out immediately. The second was to the morgue. Dr. Sutton was in the main autopsy room and had left orders that he was not to be disturbed.

Sands replaced the telephone and went to the door. Mrs. Shane was coming downstairs. She wore a silk brocaded housecoat, and Sands knew from the expression on her face that she guessed what he had to tell her. At the bottom of the steps she paused and waited for Jane.

Jane was next. She clung to the banister, murmuring plaintively that it was so early, she hated to get up early. Mrs. Shane took her arm firmly and led her toward the library.

Jane looked at the inspector with reproach. "I told you everything I knew yesterday. You needn't have come so early."

She yawned and sighed and curled up on the window seat. Her blond curls were tousled and she looked like a sleepy kitten.

Nora and Prye came in together. Prye shut the door.

"Any news?" he asked.

Jane was wide awake in a second. "Did Duncan come home? Have you found him?"

"We found him," Sands said. "I'm afraid he's dead."

JANE was staring at him blankly. "You don't mean Duncan. Duncan isn't dead. You never even saw him. How could you know him if you found him dead? You've made a mistake." Her voice rose shrilly. "Duncan always said that policemen were dumb. Now I know—"

"Be quiet, Jane," Mrs. Shane said. "It's true, I suppose?"

Sands nodded.

Mrs. Shane put her arms around Jane. "My poor Janie. You must bear up, Jane. Time heals all wounds and wipes away all tears."

Her words had a surprising effect on Jane. The girl pushed her away and turned to the inspector.

Sands watched her curiously. Despite

her attire and her uncombed hair, she looked very dignified.

"How did my brother die?"

"He fell down the steps," Sands said uneasily.

"What steps?"

"The steps of the veranda."

"And that killed him?" There was some scorn mixed with the dignity now.

"Yes. His skull was fractured. The milkman found him early this morning."

"The milkman!"

The news was a shock. She began to sob and talk through the sobs: found like that . . . Duncan would have hated. . . . So undignified . . . Duncan's pride. . . .

Sands listened, uncomfortable and puzzled. To his astonishment he found that he was also a little angry. It wasn't that the girl was stupid, but she had the wrong set of standards, Duncan's standards, obviously. Who in the hell was this Duncan that he shouldn't be found dead by a milkman?

The sobs continued. Inspector Sands made a motion to Mrs. Shane, and she led Jane out of the room.

Nora said, "Shall I leave, too?"

"No. I'd like to talk to you. Sit down. You, too, Dr. Prye."

Prye and Nora sat down beside each other on the window seat, stiffly, like two children newly arrived at a party and still conscious of their Sunday clothes.

"Was it murder?" Prye asked.

Already the question was becoming monotonous to Sands. Before the day is over, he thought, I shall have answered that fifty times, and I have no answer to give.

"I don't know," he said. "If the events of yesterday had not occurred I'd say that the young man had taken too much to drink last night and that on reaching the top of the veranda steps he lost his balance and fell, hitting his head on a flagstone. But in view of the poison in his pitcher of water, Duncan's death seems too—coincidental."

"The coincidences can be explained," Prye said, "if Duncan himself wrote that letter to me and poisoned the water and put in the anonymous telephone call. As far as I know he was the only person with a motive for stopping the wedding—he wanted to marry Nora—and the method

he chose is consistent with other facts about Duncan. He was a notorious practical joker, for one thing. I had a long talk with Jane last night."

"And she said he was a practical joker," Sands asked, frowning.

Prye smiled wryly. "No indeed. She said that Duncan had 'such a nice sense of humor,' and illustrated it by two hair-raising tales, one of them involving a rattlesnake with its fangs removed."

"He put it in somebody's piano bench," Nora explained.

"I should have been told yesterday about this," Sands said.

"I didn't know it yesterday," Prye replied easily. "And I believe Miss Shane had forgotten the episode."

Sands fastened his eyes on Nora. "When you have guests, Miss Shane, do you usually put supplies of paper and ink in each room?"

"Yes," Nora replied.

"You read the letter that was written to Dr. Prye warning him of a murder?"

"Yes."

"Did you recognize the paper and ink?"

"It was the same paper," Nora said, "but the ink was a different color. We use black, and the letter was written in blue."

"THE ink on the letter was a common brand of nutgall ink sold for use in fountain pens. Nutgall ink changes color slowly until it's completely dried in about two years. We were able by the use of a tintometer to ascertain that the letter was written very recently. It was written with a gold-nibbed fountain pen by someone who wrote slowly and carefully."

Nora said with a trace of impatience: "But you don't know who wrote it?"

"Not definitely. We may in time."

"Well, I know. Everything about that letter adds up to Duncan. The style is his. He has a fountain pen, he uses blue ink, and it's the kind of thing he does."

"Not very compelling reasons," Sands said mildly, "since the young man is dead. May I see his room now?"

Wherever Duncan visited he managed by suggestion or demand to get the best room available. He had been given the master bedroom at the front of the house above the drawing room.

Because of its varied uses the master bedroom was sexless. There were no ruffled curtains or lace spread to annoy a male occupant, and no manly leather chairs or strategically placed briar pipes to annoy a female. The curtains were dark blue silk with a wide ivory stripe, the bed was ivory, and the rug dark blue to match the curtains. There was a blond maple desk near the window and it was to this that Inspector Sands first directed his attention.

In the drawer he found the paper and black ink placed there by Nora, as well as a straight pen with a fine nib.

Sands picked up a sheet of the paper and held it against the light. It was, as Nora had said, the same paper as that of the letter to Prye. Sands leafed through the remaining sheets of it. Near the bottom he found a half-finished letter beginning "Dear George."

Bannister must have missed it yesterday, Sands thought. He said he couldn't find a sample of Duncan's writing. I'll have to give him hell.

He picked up the letter by one corner and read it.

DEAR GEORGE:

Your taste in camouflage becomes prettier. Too pretty. I think you'd better come yourself this time. My invitation here extends for another week. You will find the Royal Y more comfortable than you'll find anything at Kingston. Saw fifty brunettes at the Windsor last night. No trouble at all. Shall exp . . .

Sands reread it, still holding it by one corner. The writing bore some resemblance to the writing on the letter to Prye. The ink was black and he could see it had been used in the straight pen lying in the drawer.

Sands removed two unused sheets of paper, placed Duncan's letter between them, and folded the three sheets twice. If Duncan wrote, Sands thought, his fingerprints will be on it somewhere, and on the pen. The pen and the folded papers he placed in his pocket.

He went over to the bureau and opened the top drawer. There was a pair of blue silk monogrammed pajamas, and also—Sands raised his brows in horror—some

blue silk underwear faintly redolent of lavender.

He closed the drawer again quickly and went through the others. Most of them were empty except for their lining of white tissue paper. Well, that was natural enough, if Duncan had come merely for a short visit.

What wasn't natural, however, was the absence of Duncan's fountain pen. Sands went through the clothes in the closet, examined the three empty suitcases, and even lifted the lavender-scented underwear out of the bureau drawer.

On his way out Sands locked the door and slipped the key in his pocket. He found Hilda in the hall with some fresh towels over her arm.

"Where is Miss Stevens' room?" he asked her.

SHE DIRECTED him by pointing toward a closed door. Appraising her, Sands decided that she would be giving notice in the near future; she wasn't the type to stick when there was trouble.

He said politely, "Thanks, Hilda. I shall want to talk to you again later."

Hilda made no move to go away but stood eying him in silence. Then she blurted out: "I'm quitting."

Sands smiled at her patiently and waited.

"I got better things to do than hop around after dumb blondes."

"I don't doubt it," Sands said pleasantly.

"Well, I have!" She gave the towels a savage jerk. "I'm no ladies' maid. I've got my pride."

She stamped off down the hall, muttering to herself. Sands walked over to Jane's door and rapped.

A wan and wasted voice told him to come in. Jane was sitting up in bed, nibbling a piece of toast, now and then giving a long, shuddering sigh. Sands noticed that the breakfast tray was nearly empty.

"I feel beastly to be eating like this," she said, the tears coming to her eyes again. "Duncan always thought eating was beastly anyway. Duncan was different from other people."

He was indeed, the inspector thought. But he gave her an encouraging and sympathetic nod.

"Did your brother have a close friend or business associate called George?"

"George," she repeated. "George. Well, there's George Bigelow. He plays awfully good tennis. He and I were in the finals last— George! You don't mean George Revel?"

"I might," Sands said cautiously. "Were he and Duncan on intimate terms?"

She was shocked. "Oh *no!* George Revel is a dreadful person. Duncan disapproved of him very strongly. Duncan may have had his faults but he certainly didn't—wasn't, I mean, promiscuous."

Sands thought of the scented underwear and said dryly, "No, I can tell he wasn't. Revel and Duncan knew each other well?"

"They knew each other, naturally. After all, Dinah's our cousin. But after the divorce George's name never passed our lips."

"And Duncan never received any letters from Mr. Revel, of course?"

"Of course not. We got letters from Dinah, though."

"Addressed to you or to Duncan?"

"To Duncan, usually, but he always told me what was in them."

I wonder, Sands thought. Aloud he said: "I understand that Duncan and Dinah were not on good terms. Doesn't an exchange of letters seem odd to you?"

"Odd?" She wrinkled her forehead. "It wasn't odd in the least. They were cousins." She paused and added in a gentle but slightly exasperated tone: "I'm afraid you don't quite understand Duncan. He had a very strict sense of duty."

"You mentioned seeing Dinah come out of Duncan's room yesterday morning. Have you talked to her about this?"

She looked up at him, her eyes wide. "I— Am I under oath?"

"No. But you will be later on. Pretend you are now. Make a game of it."

"You needn't talk to me as if I were a child," she said haughtily. "Dinah came to me last night and asked me not to mention that I saw her. She said it wasn't important. I said I wouldn't promise. I said the Truth Will Out. And so it will."

"Very often it does."

"This time it will." She flung him a triumphant glance. "You needn't think I swallowed all that twaddle about Duncan falling down the steps."

Sands was annoyed but refused to give her the satisfaction of seeing his annoy-

ance. "Twaddle it may be," he said pleasantly. "Did your brother have a fountain pen?"

"Yes. It was blue and it had his name on it. Duncan loved to have his name on things."

"Where did he carry the pen?"

"In his pocket. I think in his vest pocket."

"Did it have a gold nib?"

She bit her underlip pensively. "Well, I don't know. If that's the best kind you can buy, then it did. Duncan believed in always buying the best."

Still patient, Sands removed from his pocket the letter he had found in Duncan's drawer. He held it in front of her. "Don't touch this letter. Read it. Is this your brother's handwriting?"

She leaned forward and studied it for a long time. When she finally replied she seemed to have forgotten the question.

"Duncan was never at any place called the Windsor," she said slowly. "He never saw fifty brunettes. He was with me every night and I never saw fifty brunettes!"

VI

PRYE WAS waiting in the library. Sands placed Duncan's letter on the desk with a laconic "Make something out of that, will you?" and sat down at the telephone.

"Sutton? Sands speaking. Make it concise and as simple as possible."

"Right," Sutton said affably. "Cause of death: fracture and concussion. Bruise on chin occurred some time before death, say about six hours. One bruise on right shoulder, two on right hip. The small number is inconsistent with a fall down stone steps. Besides, they occurred earlier, like the chin bruise. High alcohol content in the brain."

"And your verdict?"

"Murder. The hat alone makes it murder in my opinion. There was some blood on it. If he'd fallen he wouldn't have landed at the bottom of the steps with his silk hat on and the hat wouldn't have blood on it. I think he was hit on the head with a heavy object and laid to rest on the flagstones. It's been done before."

"Much bleeding?"

"Very little. If the murderer was quick

he could have placed the body on the flagstones while the hair was still absorbing most of the blood. Death, by the way, was not immediate, but he was certainly unconscious from the time he received the blow. Died some time between twelve and two. O.K.?"

"Fine," Sands said, and hung up. He called police headquarters.

Yes, there had been several cars hauled in that morning. Sure, one of them was a new Cadillac roadster, blue, Massachusetts license plates, doors initialed D.S. It was found on Front Street near the Union Station. There was no gasoline in the tank. The ignition key had been left in the car.

"All right," Sands said. "Connect me with Darcy if he's awake."

Darcy was awake. He said briskly, "Yes, Inspector?"

"You know the young man with the Cadillac roadster you were looking for all day yesterday, Darcy? He's been found. Dead. And the car's been found. In front of the *Union Station*!"

"I must have missed it, sir," Darcy said efficiently.

"You must have, yes," Sands said. "Make up for it today. I want to know if he went into the station, what he did, how he got back to this house. Try the cabs. If he took one I want to see the driver."

He hung up and turned to Prye. "What do you make of the letter?"

"A mystery," Prye said. "First mystery, who is George?"

"Hadn't Mrs. Revel a husband called George?"

"So I gather. I've never met him."

"He's a broker in Montreal," Sands said. "And what did Duncan Stevens do in Boston?"

Prye looked at him sharply. "I see. Broker Duncan writing to Broker George."

"Oh, it's better than that. Didn't you know that Dennis Williams is employed by George Revel?"

"Again no." Prye paused. "That suggests that the 'pretty camouflage' is Dennis. Dennis is here ostensibly as Dinah's fiancé and as a guest for the wedding. If actually he's here to collect something from Duncan then he is a pretty camouflage. Duncan thought he was too pretty. Duncan wanted George to 'come himself this time.'"

Sands smiled. "You're doing well. Go on to the rest of the letter."

Prye leaned over the desk again, then straightened up, frowning. "Well, the Royal Y is the Royal York, and I suppose it is better than any hotel they have in Kingston, but it seems silly to mention it."

"Kingston," Sands said, "has quite a nice penitentiary but certainly it can't be compared to the Royal York Hotel. Go on, please."

"Penitentiary? Then it's a threat on Duncan's part?"

"Or a warning," Sands suggested. "If he and Revel were partners I fancy it's a warning. He implies that Revel is getting too careless, that he had better attend to the business himself and not send a subordinate."

"Fifty brunettes at the Windsor," Prye said slowly. "The Windsor sounds like a burlesque house."

"**T**ORONTO is relatively free of burlesque houses. There are two running at present but neither is called the Windsor. The only Windsor I could find in the telephone book is an apartment hotel of unimpeachable reputation. You live in Detroit, Dr. Prye. The word Windsor will have a different connection altogether in your mind."

Prye said, "It has. Windsor suggests passing through the Canadian customs, and the customs suggests smuggling. All right. Duncan says he has managed to smuggle fifty brunettes across the border at Windsor with 'no trouble at all.' Well, well. All I can say is he's a better man than I am. I'd undertake one brunette under six months of age but no more."

"So," Sands said, "they weren't brunettes."

"No," Prye said. "And what were they?"

"I'd like to know. Perhaps after a talk with Mr. Revel and Mr. Williams and Mrs. Revel—"

"You don't think Dinah has anything to do with this business?"

Sands shrugged. "The word 'pretty' suits Dinah a little better than it does Mr. Williams. As for camouflage, one would hardly expect a woman to be in partnership with her ex-husband. But whoever Revel's agent is, it's clear that Duncan didn't trust him or her. So he began to

write a letter to Revel. He stops in the middle of a word. Why? Because someone comes along the hall, perhaps, and raps on his door. Duncan puts the letter between sheets of unused paper. It's as good a temporary hiding place as any."

"But it was a dangerous letter to leave lying around," Prye objected. "I don't think he would have left it. He was too cautious."

Sands smiled cynically. "Cautious, but dead. I can think of two reasons why the letter might have been left in the drawer. First, he had no time to mail it or dispose of it. Second, if the letter had gotten into the wrong hands while Duncan was alive, Duncan could have explained it away, as a joke perhaps. But if the letter was found after he died it would mean danger not for Duncan but for someone else. For all we know, the letter is a deliberate plant, a subtle variation on the kind of thing we've had some experience with in the department: 'To be opened in the event of my death by violence.'"

"In that case," Prye said dryly, "he might have made it a little clearer."

"Again, perhaps he had no time. The usual procedure in these cases is to leave the letter with a lawyer. But Duncan's lawyer is in Boston. Duncan may have found out unexpectedly that his life was in danger. Suppose he were murdered. If he wrote a letter denouncing the murderer there is more than a chance that the murderer would find and destroy it. But if the letter were written in sufficiently veiled terms there is a chance it wouldn't be destroyed. I am taking into account the description of Duncan's appearance in the vestibule of the church. He looked 'frightened' according to the report."

Prye took a cigarette from his case and lit it. Sands was refolding the letter and putting it back in his pocket.

"Rather a bright boy, Duncan," Sands said, staring out of the window. "Whatever he was bringing across the border to Revel, he waited until he had a good reason for coming across. As guests going to a wedding he and his sister would be allowed through with a minimum of inspection. He and his sister," Sands repeated slowly. "What part does she play in this mix-up?"

"Another camouflage," Prye suggested. "An unconscious one, of course. If I were

a fancy crook bluffing my way across the border I'd pick up a nice-looking female moron like Jane as a shield."

SANDS was still looking out of the window. "She was astonished at the contents of that letter. She said Duncan couldn't have seen fifty brunettes because *she* hadn't seen them. There was the faintest trace of resentment in her voice." He turned to Prye, smiling. "I think she suspected that Duncan skipped out on her to see fifty brunettes and she didn't like it a bit. But the question is, what are the brunettes? Who has them now? Was Duncan killed because he refused to hand them over? Or did someone apart from Revel's agent find out about them and kill Duncan to hijack them? And when did Duncan write the letter to Revel?"

"Yesterday morning," Prye said after a pause.

"That's what I think. The possibility that Duncan left the letter deliberately is not a strong one. We'll assume that he intended to finish and post it when he had the chance. Why didn't he have the chance?"

Prye said, "Because Dinah Revel knocked on his door. Duncan was not sleeping but writing that letter when the knock came. Perhaps he pretended to Dinah that he was asleep or perhaps he talked to her and pretended to be asleep later when his sister came in. He still had no opportunity to finish what he'd been writing because Dinah's exit and Jane's entrance coincided. Jane woke him up by pouring water on his face. We have her word that he was terribly angry, which would be natural enough if he were really awake. He pretends to wake up then and sends Jane downstairs to get him more water because she has used up what was in the pitcher. And then we come to an interesting point how much water was in the pitcher? Jane said it was *half* full.

"It's probably Jackson's duty to fill that pitcher every night. Why was it *half* full? Because Duncan had been away before and had drunk half of it. And Duncan wasn't poisoned. So if the water was perfectly all right when Duncan drank some of it but was poisoned when Jane drank it, we are led to Dinah Revel. It was Dinah who visited Duncan's room."

"We'll have to ask Jackson," Sands said.

He put his hand on the bell and in a few minutes Jackson appeared, followed by Sergeant Bannister and a middle-aged woman carrying a portable typewriter.

Sands motioned to the stenographer to sit down.

"We may as well take your statement formally, Jackson."

Jackson looked embarrassed. "I've never made a formal statement to the police. I don't know what to say."

"I'll jog you," Sands replied. "First your full name, employment, and length of employment."

In half an hour the stenographer was typing on her portable:

"My name is Edward Harold Jackson. I have been employed as houseman by Mrs. Jennifer Shane at 197 River Road for the past two months. I am an American citizen, born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts. During my employment in Toronto I have met the deceased twice. The first time I met him was shortly after my arrival, when the deceased came to visit Mrs. Shane. The second time was lost Tuesday, when he arrived by motor from Boston to be a guest at Miss Shane's wedding. On neither occasion did I have any personal conversation with him. I performed the same duties for him as I did for the other male guests.

"On September the twenty-ninth, last Friday evening, I filled a pitcher with water and left it beside the deceased's bed, according to my instructions from the deceased himself. He gave me no reason. The pitcher was at least seven eighths full of water. I did this after I helped the deceased retire for the night, shortly after twelve o'clock. I did not enter his room again until nine-thirty the following morning. Miss Stevens was coming out of the deceased's room as I was passing through the hall. She had an empty pitcher in her hand. She instructed me to help the deceased get dressed for the wedding. I did so. I went downstairs at approximately ten o'clock.

"DURING the time I spent with the deceased no one came into the room except Miss Stevens, who brought back the pitcher full of water. When I went downstairs the deceased came with

me and I served breakfast to him and Mr. Williams. The wedding party left the house at approximately half-past ten. I did not see the deceased again until my attention was directed to him by Mr. Harrison, the milkman, at approximately six o'clock, on Sunday morning. I swear that these statements are true."

The stenographer whisked the sheets of paper out of her typewriter and Jackson signed his name to both copies.

Sands went over to Sergeant Bannister, who was standing disconsolately looking at the ceiling.

"Think you can take some statements by yourself now?"

Bannister blushed with pleasure. "Oh, yes, sir! Very kind of you, sir."

"All right. Get to work in the sitting room down the hall. As each one is finished bring it to me and I'll look it over. You may go."

"You might have told me," the stenographer said acidly, "before I set up house-keeping in here."

She snapped the lid on her typewriter and went out. Jackson and Bannister followed.

The inspector's eyes rested on Prye "Well?"

"Well," Prye echoed, "I guess I'll have to believe him. He filled the pitcher, Duncan drank some of it when he awoke, and somebody poisoned the rest. The whole setup's rather odd—Duncan lying in bed feigning sleep while somebody drops poison into his water."

"Miss Shane seems quite positive that Duncan wrote the letter you received at the church. If he did, one can assume that it was he who poisoned the water too, *perhaps intending to drink it himself* to stop the wedding. Then when he saw Jane drinking it he decided that her collapse would do just as well as his own and let her drink it."

"Very Duncanesque, yes," Prye said.

"Still, it's not as likely as the Mrs. Revel theory, is it? I would like to talk to that young woman. See if she's up, will you?"

Prye found Dinah in the dining room. She was wearing tailored green silk pajamas with a matching coat. She had a cup of black coffee in front of her. Across the table Aspasia was chewing with lady-like precision on a piece of toast.

The two ladies were ignoring each other.

Prye said, "Good morning," and gave Dinah the inspector's message. She got up, nodded coolly at Aspasia, and walked to the door. In the hall she put her hand on Prye's arm and told him to wait.

Prye stopped.

"What's he like?" Dinah asked. "Barking or biting?"

"Neither. He's nice. Hard to fool, I should say."

Dinah gave a short, bitter laugh. "There isn't a father's son of you that's hard to fool."

"Well, don't be too clever. Your position isn't too good."

"Why mine?" She paused, her eyes suddenly hard. "Oh, I get it. The hepatica's jaw dropped and something fell out of it?"

"More or less. Jane told the truth."

Dinah smiled thinly. "You dear little male children. To you anything that comes out of a rosebud mouth is pure gospel. Well, my mouth is no rosebud but I'll do the best I can."

She walked away with a casual wave of her hand. At the library door she turned around and grinned.

"Better stay out, Paul. I haven't told the awful, somber truth for years and I might be embarrassed in front of a witness."

"I wouldn't want to embarrass you," Prye said virtuously. "I'll wait in the hall."

Dinah raised a thin eyebrow. "There are chairs in the drawing room and not in the hall. Besides, I won't be talking very loudly."

SHE OPENED the library door, walked in, and closed the door firmly behind her. Prye heard her cheerful, "Hello, Inspector. Think you can handle me alone or shall we put Dr. Prye out of his agony and let him come in?"

The inspector's reply was inaudible so Prye walked across the hall into the drawing room.

Dennis Williams was sitting in front of the fireplace with a book in one hand and a drink in the other. He looked up. "What's the commotion out in the hall?"

"No commotion," Prye said. "Dinah."

Dennis grinned. "Same thing. What does the nasty policeman want with Dinah?"

"I don't know."

"I wonder," Dennis said.

"Go ahead and wonder," Prye said politely.

Dennis yawned and let his book slide to the floor. Prye noticed that it was a copy of *Macbeth*.

"Chasing rainbows, I see; improving your mind."

Dennis yawned again. "This is the dammedest wedding I've ever been at. Too bad about Jane and Duncan."

"Especially about Jane," Prye said.

"Why especially?"

"I don't know. Probably because there'll be no one to look after her."

"Hell," Dennis said. "She can always get someone to look after her."

"Someone such as you."

Dennis sat up straight. "What does that mean?"

"Nothing much," Prye said. "I merely thought you'd like the job."

"I'm not anxious to get married."

"No, I noticed that."

"Why should I be?"

"This is a hell of a conversation," Prye said. "Have a cigarette?"

"You started it. I have my own cigarettes."

"Gold-tipped and monogrammed?"

Dennis scowled. "You're trying to start trouble, are you?"

"I suppose I am," Prye said. "It's my nature. When trouble doesn't come to me I go to it. Besides, I don't like the idea of George sending you here to collect from Duncan, using my wedding as a cover up."

"George who?" Dennis asked.

"George Revel, as in Dinah Revel."

"George didn't send me here. Don't be absurd. He doesn't even know I'm here and he'll raise hell when he finds out. He's crazy about Dinah."

"I think Revel sent you here," Prye said.

"What you think is my idea of something not to get excited about," Dennis said. "As long as you don't think out loud in front of the wrong people."

"The wrong people as typified by Inspector Sands have already thought. The

verdict: Revel sent you here to collect from Duncan. Same as mine, see?"

"I see," Dennis said carefully. "I am elected number-one goat because you're going to be related to the rest of the household."

Prye got up and walked over to the fireplace.

"Look, Williams. Sands has found a letter from Duncan to George Revel which makes it rather clear that Revel was sending an agent to this house to collect something from Duncan and that Duncan himself was not satisfied with the agent. You work for Revel and you are here in the house and I can easily imagine Duncan not being satisfied with you."

"Can you?" Dennis said. "Tsk."

"Because you were making passes at his sister."

"She liked them."

"I bet all the girls do," Prye said, "but I wouldn't call that important. The important thing is, *did* you collect from Duncan?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I DIDN'T know he had anything to collect," Dennis said coolly. "I came here for the wedding. I even bought you a silver sandwich tray for which you haven't thanked me, incidentally. Also incidentally, I hope you choke on every sandwich you eat off it. I am, in brief, a simple, guileless wedding guest with no ulterior motive up my sleeve and a burning desire to get my twenty bucks back on that sandwich tray."

"I never use them anyway," Prye said. "But thanks. I'll do as much for you some day when you decide on the woman. How much do you know about George Revel's business?"

"Practically nothing," Dennis admitted cheerfully. "The business angle is for George. My forte is the drawing room. I sit around making myself pleasant, even as I am doing now, without thought of reward. I'm a kind of contact man. I lead the horses to water and George makes them drink. I get a commission on all water drunk."

"How long have you been working for Revel?"

"A year and a half."

"Before the divorce, that is. You wouldn't have had anything to do with the divorce I suppose?"

"Not a thing," Dennis said virtuously. "Besides, in Quebec women don't get divorces because someone else has captured their fancy. They've got to have a long list of complaints and Dinah had. George can be quite a cutup."

"And after the divorce you and Dinah were strangely drawn toward each other?"

"That's right. Dinah's a nice girl."

"And a clever girl."

"I'm afraid so," Dennis said with a sardonic smile.

"Clever enough to know all about George's business?"

"I think so."

"Dinah still friendly with George?"

Dennis hesitated. "I don't know. I haven't seen them together since the divorce and she doesn't talk about him."

"You unlovely liar," Prye said. "In the short time since I've known Dinah she has referred to George variously as a louse, a heel, and a punk."

"Not to me," Dennis insisted. "Of course I know she's a little bitter about the whole thing. But any woman would be."

"And Dinah more so."

"Maybe."

"In fact," Prye said, "Dinah has a grudge against Revel. She wants to hit back at him. Now suppose you too have a grudge against Revel and *you'd* like to get back at him too. Such a pleasant partnership. Dinah provides the money—"

There was a rap at the door and Jackson appeared with a message that Dennis was wanted on the telephone. Dennis followed him out of the room.

In five minutes Jackson was back again.

"I thought you'd be wanting to see me, sir," he said.

Prye looked at him coolly without speaking.

"There is an extension phone in the kitchen," Jackson said carefully, "which has its uses."

"Ten dollars," Prye said.

"I was figuring on twenty, sir. A word-for-word report is worth twenty, I think."

"O.K. Twenty."

Jackson cleared his throat. "Well, it was a local call, sir, from a man called George. Mr. Williams gave a gasp when

George identified himself, then he said: 'I can't talk to any reporters now. The police have forbidden it.' George then wanted to know if Mr. Williams was crazy. Mr. Williams said: 'No I can't talk to any reporters about the murder.' Mr. Williams then hung up."

Prye gave him a twenty

Jackson pocketed it with a smile. "Easy money. Too bad I didn't think of this when I was working my way through college."

"I'm not sure you didn't," Prye said.

HE FOLLOWED Jackson into the hall. Mr. Shane was just coming out of the small sitting room farther down the hall. When she saw Prye she swept toward him with a flutter of silk.

"I have just thought of something, Paul," she announced. "I didn't know my eyedrops were poison. How could anyone else have known?"

"There are plenty of books on toxicology," Prye replied. "Just how much had you used out of that bottle?"

"Very little. It was tiresome."

"When you used them did you taste anything some time afterward?"

"I didn't *swallow* them, Paul," Mrs. Shane said patiently. "I put them in my eyes."

"The question still goes."

Mrs. Shane pursed her lips thoughtfully. "Now that you mention it I recall a distinctly bitter taste. It was more a sensation at the back of my throat than a taste, if you know what I mean. And, quite, quite bitter. I wonder if it would do any good for me to ask each person in the house if he or she took the eyedrops from my bathroom."

"It can't do any harm," Prye said dryly.

"Then I shall. There's Dinah. I shall ask her first."

Dinah was coming out of the library. She was smiling but there was a thin line of white around her mouth.

"What were you going to ask me, Aunt Jennifer?" she said sharply.

Mrs. Shane looked somewhat uncomfortable. "Well, I'm going to ask everyone, of course."

"What is it?"

"Did you take the eyedrops from my bathroom?"

Dinah stared at her. "No, I didn't. And when I go in for poisoning blondes I'll use something stronger than eyedrops." She went past them up the stairs.

"Such language," Mrs. Shane said absently.

Inspector Sands appeared in the doorway of the library and beckoned to Prye. Prye excused himself and joined him.

"Shut the door," Sands said.

Prye shut the door.

"Mrs. Revel is an odd woman."

"Somewhat neurotic," Prye agreed. "A lot of intelligent people are. Dinah's case seems to be a little more pronounced because she has money enough not to care what other people think."

Sands hesitated a moment. "Well, frankly, I thought she told me a straightforward and convincing story."

"I thought she would," Prye commented.

"First she told me she had no motive to do away with Duncan beyond dislike. Second, she admitted going into Duncan's room before the wedding because she had seen a letter lying on the hall table addressed to Duncan in Revel's handwriting. She went in to ask Duncan what it was. He was sleeping, she said, and did not wake up. She left immediately. Third, she did not correspond with Duncan."

"Who said she did?" Prye asked in surprise.

"Jane Stevens. What really happened was this: Revel had been writing to Duncan from Montreal. Duncan simply told his sister the letters were from Mrs. Revel, pretended to quote from them, and trusted to luck that Jane wouldn't find out. Jane swallowed everything he told her and Duncan apparently did all the social letterwriting for both of them."

"He would," Prye said. "There was a pronounced feminine streak in him."

"More than a streak. Four, Mrs. Revel says she is engaged to marry Dennis Williams. It hasn't been announced yet, but apparently he is having a ring made for her."

"His story."

"Yes. Five, she had no relations with her former husband and has no idea what business he and Duncan had between them. Six, I don't know what to think about this."

He paused and added slowly, "She said

that when she met Jane going into Duncan's room Jane was carrying a small green glass bottle, the kind of bottle *eyedrops* are put in."

Prye smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry to spoil the fun but Jane has said she was taking some aspirin tablets in to Duncan, and at least one large drug company packs its aspirins in green bottles."

Sands looked gloomily up at the ceiling and said, "Hell, hell."

VII

THE TALL, sleek man with the rawhide suitcase stepped out of the elevator, waved aside the bellhop who assailed him, and walked to the desk.

"Rourke," he told the desk clerk. "I'm checking out."

While the clerk was looking up the bill Mr. Rourke stood with his back to the lobby fingering the rawhide case nervously. His uneasiness seemed incongruous with his casual brown tweeds and his air of authority.

"Three days. Fifteen dollars. Plus two telephone calls makes it fifteen dollars and twenty cents. Thank you very much, Mr. Rourke. Everything satisfactory?"

"Fine," Mr. Rourke said. "Call my car, will you?"

He put on his hat and pulled it down over his eyes. While he was waiting for his car a man came to the desk and asked for a single room with bath. His name was Williams, he told the clerk.

Mr. Rourke did not turn his head at this information but his mouth moved:

"You damn fool, Williams."

Dennis Williams told the clerk that 507 would be fine and that he would pay in advance as his luggage hadn't arrived yet. While he was signing his name in the register Mr. Williams' mouth also moved:

"Follow me up." He walked toward the elevators.

Mr. Rourke went out to his car, put his bag inside, and drove off. He drove three blocks along Front Street and parked his car in a parking lot. Ten minutes later he was mounting the steps to the fifth floor of the Royal York, cursing the climb and Mr. Williams. When the door of 507 opened Mr. Rourke repeated his original observation:

"You damn fool, Williams. You're probably being trailed."

"I shook him," Dennis said. "Oh, it's all right, George. *Your* skin is safe. How about mine?"

George took off his hat and flung it across the room onto the bed. He sat down in the chair beside the desk and frowned at Dennis.

"Well. What's up?"

"Stevens has been killed," Dennis said.

"When?"

"Last night."

Mr. Rourke looked pensive. "Why all the fuss? We don't lose anything."

"But—but it's murder, I tell you!"

"I'm surprised Duncan has lived this long," Mr. Rourke murmured philosophically.

"Don't be so sure of yourself, George. He left behind a letter to *you*!"

Mr. Rourke didn't move, but the skin on his face seemed to tighten. "What was in it?"

Dennis told him.

"Unfinished, eh?" Mr. Rourke said.

"That means no envelope. Bloody luck, the letter, but it could be worse."

Dennis smiled bitterly. "The hell it could. I'm halfway to the gallows already."

"You'll be all right if you say nothing. And I mean *nothing*! Don't even discuss the weather. Unless"—Mr. Rourke smiled grimly—"you killed Duncan yourself."

Dennis jumped out of his chair. "Don't be crazy! Why in hell should I kill him?"

"Why did he leave the letter, Williams? Because he didn't trust you. Well, I don't trust you very much myself. It wouldn't surprise me to hear you'd killed Duncan, collected the stuff, and were planning a vacation in South America. With *my* wife, incidentally."

"Your ex-wife," Dennis said. "Besides, you know me, George. I wouldn't stoop to a thing like that."

"My Lord," Mr. Rourke said. "Shut up and let me think."

He thought for some time. Then he said, "How many this time?"

"Fifty. He said it used up most of his cash. He said he was getting sick of the whole business anyway, there wasn't enough in it."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know. He wouldn't tell *me* anyway."

"You'd better go back and dig it up."

DENNIS knocked the chair away violently. "I'm not going back! I've made my statement. The police said I could go back to Montreal if I promised to come back when they asked me to."

Mr. Rourke remained calm. "You're going back to that house, Williams. We can't afford to have it found. If you keep your mouth shut and if the stuff isn't found, we're safe. So you'll go back to the house and find out where Duncan put it. Or if someone murdered Duncan to get it, you're going to find out where the murderer put it and bring it to me. It's 25 per cent for you if you can do it. If you can't it's the penitentiary."

"I can't go back!" Dennis cried. "What excuse would I give for going back now that they've let me go?"

"Tell them you feel you want to stay until the investigation is finished. Tell them you're such an honest, upright young man that you want to do your bit to make the truth prevail. Or tell them—and perhaps this is best—that your place is at Dinah's side in this time of distress."

"I can't go back," Dennis repeated.

"You're going. You'll keep in touch with me, of course, by telephone. And for Heaven's sake use your head when you telephone. Go to a pay station and see that you're not followed."

Dennis sat down again, looking worried. "How long have *you* been in Toronto, George?"

"Got here yesterday. Better make it snappy, Williams. I'm driving back to Montreal now."

"What do I do about this room?"

"Leave it," Mr. Rourke said softly.

"Leave it, my dear Williams. You can't take it with you."

He picked up his hat from the bed and put it on. With a last warning look at Dennis he opened the door and stepped out into the hall. Going down the back stairs he collided with an extremely tall young man who was coming up.

The tall young man said, "Sorry. Very sorry indeed, I'm sure." He sounded drunk. He began to brush off Mr. Rourke's coat, mumbling elaborate apologies.

"I'm in a hurry," Mr. Rourke said.

"You want a drink," the tall man said.

"You're a man after my own heart, always hurrying and always hurrying for a drink. You make sense. I like you."

Mr. Rourke slipped past the young man and started to descend the stairs again. It took him ten minutes to find the parking lot where he had left his car.

"Cream-colored Oldsmobile coupé," he told the attendant.

The attendant looked at him sharply and said, "Oh yeah? What number?"

Mr. Rourke told him the number.

The attendant said "Yeah?" again and scratched the side of his head. "Damn funny. That car left a couple of minutes ago. Tall guy. Knew the number so I thought it was his."

Mr. Rourke cursed softly but skillfully under his breath.

"Gosh, I'm sorry," the attendant said. "I'm new here. I'll report it to the police right away."

But Mr. Rourke put out his hand and held him back. "Don't do that. It's my kid brother. He's always pulling stuff like this. I'll find him myself."

He walked away rapidly toward the Union Station. He was nearly there when he heard a horn tooting behind him and turned to see a cream-colored coupé drawing up to the curb. The man at the wheel looked familiar and the car even more familiar.

"What in hell?" Mr. Rourke said.

"Hop in," the young man said. "I'm not drunk. Your life is as safe in my hands as it ever will be."

HE OPENED the door of the car. Mr. Rourke glanced up and down the street and got in. "What's the game?" he said.

The young man grinned. "Hunt the button. You're cast as the button, Revel."

"The name is Rourke."

"Oh, come," the man said, "you needn't be ashamed of Revel for a name. After all, my name is Prye, and Revel's a lot nicer than that."

"So you're Prye," Mr. Revel said softly.

"That's right."

"And you've been looking for me, Dr. Prye?"

"Not hard, Mr. Revel, not hard. You

weren't very well hidden. And you use the telephone most indiscriminately. Shall we drive out to the Shanes'?"

"What do you want?" Revel said.

"A talk."

"Talk here if you have to. I'm on my way back to Montreal."

"On the other hand, *I'm* at the wheel of the car," Prye said pleasantly. "Inspector Sands wants to see you. I told him I'd try and arrange a meeting. It was very simple to follow Dennis. He looks so furtive you can't miss."

"I don't want to see Dinah," Revel said.

Prye let in the clutch and pulled away from the curb. "You probably won't if she sees you first. You can call a policeman if you like, Revel, and have me arrested."

"Oh, no," Revel said politely, "I am not a vindictive man. Besides, it's a good opportunity to catch up on my sleep."

He took off his hat, laid it on the seat, leaned back, and went to sleep. Mr. Revel was, at times, a philosopher.

He was awakened by the jolt of the car as it stopped and Prye's voice saying, "You've got either a good conscience or no conscience, Revel."

Revel got out of the car, yawning, and put on his hat. He looked toward the house, expecting to see a crowd of curiosity-seekers, but there was nobody visible at all.

"Where's my public?" he asked Prye with a thin smile.

"The police keep a thumb on the reporters in this city," Prye said. "As for the neighbors, this is a well-bred section of the city. People may peer out of windows but they don't show themselves."

Revel followed him up the flagstone walk. Prye pointed. "He was lying here. See the blood?"

"I am not," Revel said carefully, "as a rule interested in blood. I have a tender stomach."

Jackson let them in. He stared at Revel with interest, but there was no sign of recognition in his eyes.

"You wouldn't remember Jackson, Mr. Revel," Prye said. "He's after your time."

Jackson said, "Welcome on the doormat, sir."

Revel glanced at him warily. If he's a servant, he thought, I'm a bishop with five

wives. Aloud he said, "Hello, Jackson. My bag's in the car if I'm invited to stay."

There was a soft gasp from the top of the staircase. The three men looked up and saw Jane clinging to the banister. She was dressed in a green chiffon negligee and she looked, Prye decided, like trailing ivy growing over the staircase.

She said, "Oh. It's— Isn't it *George*?" Her voice was cold, as if she considered Revel's presence a personal insult.

Revel ignored the tone. He went up the stairs to meet her, smiling.

"My dear Jane," he said, stretching out his hands, "you have my deepest sympathy."

Jane hesitated. The trace of suspicion vanished from her eyes and a tear rolled down her cheek.

"Oh, *George*!" she wailed plaintively.

JACKSON moved discreetly toward the kitchen. Revel coaxed Jane down the stairs and held one arm around her while she wept copiously into his brown tweed coat. Revel was quite unmoved. His only emotion was a kind of wonder that anyone should cry over that ass Duncan. He was still standing absorbing tears when Dinah came into the hall. When she saw him she stopped short, her face white, her mouth tightened into a thin red line.

"Well," she said in a brittle voice, "if it isn't God's gift to all the girls in Montreal. And at it already, I see."

Revel thrust Jane away from him. His face was flushed but his voice as steady and cool as Dinah's.

"Hello, Dinah. Fancy meeting you here. It's a small world."

"Too damn small," Dinah said. "What are you doing here?"

Revel said, "I was kidnapped. Sorry if I've ruined love's young dream for you. How is Dennis, by the way?"

Jane stopped weeping and was listening hard. Prye was listening pretty hard himself. Dinah turned on him savagely.

"Did you invite him here, Paul?"

"Invite," Revel said, "is understatement. I told you, Dinah, I had to come. I'll leave as soon as the police let me."

Dinah said, "If I thought it would make it any sooner I'd seduce the commissioner."

Jane cried, "Oh" in a shocked voice.

Prye took her arm and gave her a little

push toward the drawing room. Over his shoulder he said, "The inspector's in the library, Revel. When you and Dinah finish your tete-a-tete drop in and see him."

"I've finished," Dinah said.

Revel said nothing. She's wearing her hair differently, he thought, and she's too thin. I wonder if she's on that damfool diet again.

"Sorry," he said, and walked across the hall to the library and rapped. The inspector opened the door. Revel said, "I'm George Revel. Were you looking for me?"

The inspector showed no surprise. "I was. Come in, Mr. Revel. My name is Sands."

They were very polite and careful.

Revel gave no indications of being nervous. He crossed the room and settled himself in the most comfortable chair. He lit a cigarette and through the smoke he studied Sands lazily. An odd little man, he decided, colorless, negative, the type who encourages you to talk by his very quietness, until you talk too much. I'll have to warn Williams about this.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Revel," Sands said, "but you probably know what has happened."

He wasn't looking at Revel. His eyes were fixed on the wall beside Revel's right shoulder. From there they wandered to Revel's feet, shod in brown English brogues, and up to his tie of yellow-and-brown knitted silk. Revel shifted his feet and put his hand up to his tie. The two movements pleased the inspector.

Revel was not accustomed to silences in which his wardrobe was examined minutely from top to bottom. He cleared his throat nervously. "Yes. Prye told me Duncan Stevens has been killed."

Sands said nothing.

"I'm sorry about it," Revel went on. "I'd honestly like to help you find out who did it but I'm afraid I can't. I didn't know Stevens very well."

"How long have you been in Toronto, Mr. Revel?"

Revel hesitated. "Three days. I come here frequently on business."

"What is your business?"

"I'm a broker."

"Stevens was a broker too. Quite a coincidence."

Revel laughed. "Hardly a coincidence. Brokers are so common most of them are broke."

Sands looked pointedly at Revel's brown tweeds and said, "Unless they have—ah, other sources of income perhaps. Ever do any business with Stevens' office?"

"Occasionally he'd recommend a client to me. I did the same for him. Other than that we had no business relations."

"I understand you employ Dennis Williams?"

"I do. He's a good man in his job. Personal relations department."

THE INSPECTOR looked bored and unconvinced. "Dear me," he said with a slight smile, "I didn't realize that brokers' offices had personal relations departments. Of course so much of my work deals with crooks. Contact men, you know. Some of these confidence swindles are pretty clever. Aren't they?"

"I don't know," Revel said. "I've never been swindled."

"I can believe that," Sands said mildly. "What did your personal relations representative have to say to you at the hotel?"

Revel ground out his cigarette in the ash tray. The action made him somewhat calmer. He couldn't afford to lose his temper.

"So you *were* trailing him," he said, smiling. "Williams is a bit naive. He thought he'd shaken the man."

Sands coughed apologetically. "He did. I thoughtfully provided a man in a green suit to be shaken. And of course if you concentrate on shaking a green suit you miss anyone else who happens to be around." He coughed again. "I'm afraid that your personal relations department has done little to aid Mr. Williams' native intelligence. I wouldn't dream of trying such an old dodge on *you*, Mr. Revel."

"I had no idea the police were so subtle," Revel said coolly.

"Answer the question. Will you please tell me what Mr. Williams said to you at the hotel?"

"Certainly. He was a little upset by the murder, you see. He knew I was in town because I had just telephoned him from the hotel. So he came down to see me. He seemed quite perturbed by a letter you'd found."

"We found a letter, yes," Sands said. "It was written by Stevens to you."

"Was it?" Revel leaned forward, frowning. "That's strange. I should hardly have thought Stevens would be writing to me. I suppose you're sure it *was* to me?"

"Reasonably sure," Sands replied.

"Perhaps if I saw the letter myself I could tell you definitely."

"Later," Sands said. Revel must know his full name isn't on the letter, he thought. Suppose he sticks to his guns and swears the letter is not to him?

"It seems," Sands went on, "as though Duncan Stevens had smuggled something across the border and brought it to this house for you or your agent to pick up."

Revel said calmly, "That sounds like a serious accusation."

"It is."

"I know nothing about it."

"I hardly thought you would, Mr. Revel," Sands said dryly. "It also seems likely to me that whoever murdered Stevens murdered him to get possession of whatever he had smuggled across."

"What could it be, I wonder?" Revel said.

"Fifty brunettes."

"Fifty brunettes." Revel leaned back in his chair and began to laugh. There was relief as well as amusement in the laugh.

"Stevens' phrase," the inspector explained. "It might mean anything. I thought you'd be able to translate it for me."

"Well, I can't." He paused. "Jewels, maybe. Say black pearls or something like that. But where would Stevens get fifty black pearls?"

So it isn't jewels, Sands thought. Even Revel isn't cool enough to supply me with the right answer immediately.

"Black opals, perhaps," Sands said.

"Perhaps," Revel agreed.

Sands patted his pocket. "I guess this letter that Stevens wrote isn't for you, then."

"It might be," Revel said, "although I don't see why Stevens should be writing to me."

SANDS looked at him appraisingly. A bright boy, he decided. He says he doesn't think the letter was written to him but he admits it *could* have been in case

we're able to prove it was. I'll have to strike at him through Williams. Williams will try to save his own hide.

"Mr. Williams is back," he said.

"Is he?" Revel said. "Well, I can spare him a few days longer."

"I was wondering if you could perhaps spare yourself a few days longer too, Mr. Revel. There is a lot I have to clear up and I think it would make it easier for me if you stayed here."

"Anything to make it easier for you," Revel said amiably. "Business is rotten anyway. Mind if I phone and let the office know?"

"Go ahead."

Revel put his call through to Montreal, issued some instructions to his secretary, and hung up.

"May I return to the hotel now?" he asked.

"That won't be necessary," Sands replied. "I've spoken to Mrs. Shane and she will be glad to have you stay here. By the way, you usually stay at the Royal York when you're in town, don't you?"

"Usually."

"Thanks. That's all for now."

Revel went out. Sands picked up the telephone and called the Royal York. The desk clerk informed him that no one called Revel had been registered there recently.

"Who has checked out within the past two hours?" Sands asked.

There was a rustling of paper at the other end of the line. "A Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby of Washington, Oregon. Mr. Rourke of Montreal—"

"Rourke a tall, well-dressed man in brown tweeds, brown hat?"

"That's him."

"When did he arrive?"

"Thursday night."

"Thanks."

Sands remained at the desk for some time twisting his pen in his hands. His notebook was open in front of him.

There was no doubt that Duncan had written the letter to Revel. There was little doubt that if Revel denied it nothing could be done. George was a common name. A great number of people found the "Royal York more comfortable than anything at Kingston." It could be a coincidence that Williams, who worked for Revel, should be staying at the Shanes'

at the same time as Duncan Stevens. Nor was it rare for an out-of-town businessman to register at a hotel under a false name, especially if the object of the visit was pleasure and not business.

And there was Duncan's car, found on Front Street conveniently near the Royal York. And Mr. Revel had arrived in Toronto on Thursday night.

Sands picked up the phone again and detailed a man to find out about Mr. Revel's movements, about the correspondence he received, the visitors, the drinks and meals sent up to his room, and whether he had any dry cleaning done on Saturday night.

In a second call to the hotel Sands requested the manager to leave Mr. Rourke's room as it was for the time being.

Then he telephoned his own office. Sergeant Darcy had located the cabdriver who took Duncan to 197 River Road from the Union Station. The cabdriver had provided a detailed description of the young man.

"Have you got him there?" Sands asked.

"Yes sir," Darcy said.

"Put him on, will you?"

The cabdriver identified himself.

"You picked him up at the station?" Sands asked.

"**Y**ES SIR. I was meeting a train and I saw this guy and asked him did he want a cab. He didn't say anything, just followed me out. He looked souse to me. Couldn't walk very well. His clothes were dirty too. What's more, when I helped him get into the cab—" He stopped suddenly.

"When you helped him into the cab what?" Sands said patiently.

"I—nothing."

"You felt his pockets, perhaps?" Sands was not unacquainted with the ways of certain cabdrivers with drunks.

"I wasn't going to do anything, honest. I just *happened* to feel something in his pocket that felt like a gun, a little gun. Well, and that's all. I just drove him home."

"You didn't actually see the gun?"

"No sir, but it was a gun. I'm sure of that."

"Did the passenger talk at all?"

"No sir."

"All right. Make your statement to Darcy and sign it. I may see you later. Good-by."

Sands rang the bell for Jackson. Jackson informed him that Mr. Williams was in the billiard room in the basement.

"Bring him up," Sands said.

Jackson went down to the basement. The door of the billiard room was closed, and he hesitated in front of it for a minute.

The cold, damp air of the cellar struck the back of his neck and it felt uncomfortable, the way it did when you got an overdue haircut in the winter, Jackson thought. He put his hand up to his neck. The skin was clammy.

There was no sound at all in the cellar. By Heaven, Jackson thought, the house has died on me again.

He put his hand on the doorknob and turned it. When the door opened a gust of warm, dry air swept into his face. Someone had lit a fire in the fireplace. The flames were hissing quietly, filling the room with soft, evil whispers.

Evil, Jackson thought. I don't believe in evil, but it's here, pressing on my ears and eyes.

He grinned at himself then, and there was even something of evil in his own grin. He knew that from the way his face felt, stiff and frozen, so he stopped grinning and walked over to the fireplace rather angrily.

He had to stop those whispers.

He took the poker and stabbed at the live coals. They spat at him defiantly. He stabbed again, laughing aloud. They could spit at him, but he was the master.

He felt very brave and powerful. His muscles flexed and he poked at the coals again. He was driving out the devil and it was fun. He forgot all about Mr. Williams, tasting his new power, watching the coals glare at him, consuming themselves with their own impotent hatred.

The fire died. He put down the poker, ashamed, thinking, I guess I must be crazy. I've got to find Mr. Williams.

Then he saw that Mr. Williams had been watching all the time. He was sitting in an easy chair in the far corner of the room, staring at Jackson.

Jackson said, "Oh. Sorry, sir. I'm very sorry, sir." His hands were trembling because he had made a fool of him-

self. Mr. Williams was about his own age.

Mr. Williams didn't say anything. He kept looking at Jackson with his cold, sardonic eyes.

"I didn't know you were here, sir," Jackson said. "I just thought I'd put the fire out. I'm a little afraid of leaving fires when there's no one in the room, sir."

Mr. Williams' gaze said plainly: "Don't kid me, Jackson. You were having fun. You've given yourself away, Jackson."

Mr. Williams himself said nothing.

Jackson was getting angry. He thought: You needn't be so stiff and formal with me, Williams. I went to Harvard and I know how you look in the mornings before you shave.

He walked to the door, jerking his coat straight.

Mr. Williams' eyes did not follow him. They were still watching the fireplace unblinkingly. Jackson walked toward him slowly.

"Hey, Williams," he said.

He saw then that Mr. Williams had three eyes, two ordinary eyes and a third eye in the middle of his forehead. When he got closer the third eye turned out to be a round black hole.

He stood there feeling sick, partly with relief that Mr. Williams was dead and had not seen him make a fool of himself. No one had. That was his secret. Mr. Williams was dead.

He went upstairs to tell Inspector Sands.

VIII

WHEN HE got to the first floor Aspasia was standing in the hall. She turned pale at the sight of him. "Jackson," she said, "Jackson."

One of the tight white curls on the top of her head had come loose and was straggling over her forehead, making her look rakish.

"Something has happened, Jackson?"

He glanced down at her and smiled almost affectionately. He was smiling because she was only a silly, weak little woman and nothing ever happened to her, nothing like finding a man with three eyes.

He said, "I'm afraid it has, Miss O'Shaughnessy. It might be better if you went to your room."

Aspasia tossed the curl from her fore-

head. She seemed about to make a sharp retort, but instead she said sadly, "Oh, Jackson, people are always telling me to go up to my room. Please tell me what has happened."

"Someone is dead," Jackson said.

"Jane," Aspasia whispered. "I told her—I warned—"

"Not Miss Stevens," Jackson said. He moved past her down the hall. When he rapped on the library door he looked back and saw her going upstairs hanging on to the banister, moving her feet slowly and painfully.

Why, she's old, Jackson thought with surprise, she's quite old. His head was feeling light, he didn't know why, and a chuckle kept forcing its way up from his stomach. Mr. Williams was dead, and Miss Aspasia was old, and Jackson was very young and alive.

The door opened and he said quietly, "Mr. Williams is dead, Inspector, shot through the forehead in the billiard room."

"All right," Sands said. "All right."

Jackson stared at him. Well, by George, he thought, this is a fine thing. You get murdered, and the law says all right. Isn't that a fine thing?

Sands walked down the hall with brisk steps. He didn't want to see the dead Mr. Williams but he kept moving his feet quickly down the steps and into the billiard room.

The room was quite dark now and he fumbled for the light switch. The green-shaded ceiling lights went on and Mr. Williams was clearly visible in the glare. Sands walked over and touched his cheek. It was warm but not as warm as it had been.

There had been a fire, Sands saw. Mr. Williams was sitting some distance from the fireplace. The heat from it would not have kept him this warm. So he died quite recently, Sands thought.

While I was upstairs. Someone had the almighty guts to kill him while I was upstairs.

Some of his anger spilled over on Mr. Williams. He said through his teeth, "His own fault. His own damn fault."

He had been shot at close range, Sands decided. There were powder marks around the wound. He had died instantly, almost before he had time to bleed, and

the gun had been fired by someone he knew, someone who was standing in front of the chair where he was sitting relaxed and comfortable after his game of billiards. He had had a cue in his hand. It lay now beside the chair where it had fallen.

While I was upstairs, Sands thought. He played his game and sat down in that chair still holding his cue, and someone came in that door and shot him.

But the shot— Why hadn't anyone heard the shot?

Sands went over to the wall and rapped it with his knuckles. The sound was dull and died immediately. Then he looked around and saw that there were no windows in the room, only an air-conditioning fan on one wall near the ceiling.

Why the fire then? he thought. Why do people build fires if not to keep warm? To burn something? And who had built it?

He bent over Mr. Williams and examined the palm of his right hand. There was a smudge of dirt on it that looked like coal dust.

He straightened up quickly and walked over to the doorway and stood in it. Someone was coming down the stairs.

NORA SHANE stepped into the arc of light that streamed from the open door of the billiard room. She came close to him, frowning. "What's happened? What are you doing in the basement?"

"How do you know anything has happened?" he asked.

"Aunt Aspasia. She said someone has died."

"Yes. Mr. Williams has been shot."

She stood perfectly still, but Sands could see her hands jerking rhythmically inside the big saddle pockets of her dress. He found himself thinking incongruously that it was a pretty dress, his favorite shade of red, and that it made her smooth hair look blacker and her eyes a brighter blue.

He said, "He's in here. You needn't look at him. I merely want to ask you about your method of heating this room."

"The fireplace," she said. Her mouth seemed stiff.

"I noticed the air-conditioning fan on the wall."

"It's not used," she said. "We had it disconnected because the room isn't often used and the fireplace is enough to heat it anyway."

He felt oppressed. He was very close to her, bound to her within the arc of light. He could see her swallow, he could see the pulse beating in her throat and her hands jerking in time to the pulse.

He stepped back a pace with a little shiver of distaste. It was his job to protect her and thousands like her, frail, vulnerable bodies with pulses in their throats that could be stilled by the pressure of two strong thumbs; thick, massive skulls that could be crumpled like paper. Not even claws to protect themselves, like small kittens. Merely tongues, the ability to say, "Don't take advantage of my helplessness or the police will take advantage of yours. . . ."

The police, me, as frail as the least of them. To hell with them all, to hell with each one—

"About these walls," he said. "They seem pretty thick to me."

"They're soundproof," Nora said.

"Why?"

"Mother wanted them that way. If any of our parties got too noisy she'd send us down here."

"I suppose your guests know this room is soundproof?"

"I suppose so," she said listlessly. "It's no secret."

"The shot apparently wasn't heard."

"I don't care," she said. "I don't care about anything."

She's going to cry, Sands thought.

"I don't have to ask you any more questions right now."

She didn't cry. She said, "We've got to stop this, send them all home immediately. I can't ask them to stay and be murdered in my house."

"They can't go," he said. "Maybe some of them don't want to go."

"What do you mean?"

He was standing in the doorway, and the cold air of the basement and the warm air of the room met under his collar. He put his hand up and rubbed his neck.

"I think there's something in this house," he said. "Duncan Stevens had it and he was murdered. I think Mr. Williams found it and he is murdered, too."

His neck was getting stiff. He kept rubbing it and wishing she would go away.

"There is nothing here," she said, and turned and walked to the steps. They creaked under her weight like an old man's bones.

Sands closed the door and the creaking stopped and the room was very quiet. He walked around it, his eyes moving restlessly. He saw the gun then, buried in one of the pockets of the billiard table.

IT LOOKED like a woman's gun. It was very small and dainty and the handle was inlaid with mother-of-pearl. He wrapped it in his handkerchief and went upstairs. Half an hour later several quiet young men filed into the basement and began their work.

In the sitting room on the first floor Sergeant Bannister was telling the stenographer the troubles of a policeman's life. You just got through taking statements about one murder and then you got another murder. Wasn't that life, though?

The stenographer rubbed the carbon stains from her fingers with a handkerchief and agreed that that was life but anyway you got paid for it.

Sure you did, the sergeant said, but the pay wasn't worth it.

The stenographer said maybe his pay would be raised if he didn't stand around yapping so much. Why wasn't he down looking at the corpse?

The sergeant said he was bloody sick of corpses, he wanted to buy a chicken farm, you get a better class of company.

They were still arguing when Prye came in.

Prye said, "May I see some of the statements you've taken, Sergeant?"

"Sure, chicken farming pays," the sergeant said to the stenographer. "Chickens lay eggs, don't they?"

"The better type of chicken," Prye said. "May I read the statements?"

"And at forty-seven cents a dozen," said the sergeant. "Boy, that's real money. I can even ship a few to Britain."

Prye went over and picked up a sheaf of papers from the table.

The statement on top was Hilda's. Her full name was Hilda Ruth Perrin and she had been employed as general maid for over a year by Mrs. Shane. There were

many erasures in Hilda's statement, as if Hilda had said a number of things she didn't care to sign her name to.

The only part of her statement which Prye found interesting was the following: "I helped Miss Stevens dress for the wedding on Saturday morning. She acted funny, all muddled up. Twice I had to get her a drink of water. She said she was afraid she was getting the flu, and that's how she looked, feverish. She took two aspirin tablets out of a green bottle."

Prye put down the statement and let out a stifled groan. The stenographer looked over at him curiously and Bannister interrupted a fifty-thousand-dollar egg deal with China to ask, "What's the matter with you?"

Prye smiled. "Too many bodies, I guess."

"They don't bother me," the stenographer confided. "I don't have to look at them. When I think of all the times I've written 'Deceased' in my life and never got a squint at one of them— Life sure is funny."

Upstairs someone began to scream shrilly. A door slammed. The screaming stopped abruptly, as if a hand had been clapped over a mouth.

Prye mounted the steps three at a time. Nora was in the upstairs hall pounding on the door of Dinah's room.

"Dinah," she cried. "Dinah, are you all right?"

From the other side of the door a muffled voice said, "Go away. Yes. Go away."

Nora turned to Prye. "Shall I—I mean, that was a terrible scream."

"Try the door," Prye said.

Nora opened the door. George Revel was standing a yard away from her, smiling at her crookedly.

"Surprise," he said. "It's perfectly all right."

Dinah was lying across the foot of the bed, her head buried in her arms. She was very quiet.

"You'd better go, George," Nora said to Revel. "I'll stay with Dinah. I don't know what you've been saying to her, George—"

"I've been saving her life," Revel said quietly. "She was going to kill herself because of that oily-haired little pimp."

Dinah's body jerked convulsively, but there was still no sound from her.

"Go away, George," Nora said. "You've got a lousy temper."

REVEL hesitated, then swung around and strode out of the door. Prye caught up with him at the head of the stairs. "I don't suppose you were exaggerating, Revel?" he said.

Revel turned round to face him. "She intended to kill herself. I walked in and she began to scream."

"Weapon?"

"She had a knife, a paper knife." He took a short, thin silver knife from his coat pocket and handed it to Prye. Prye felt the edge of it with his fingers.

"A weapon of sorts," he said, handing it back. He looked down and saw that Inspector Sands was standing at the bottom of the steps watching them.

"I'll take that," Sands said.

Revel gave a short laugh and started down the steps holding the paper knife rather contemptuously between two fingers. He held it out to the inspector.

"There it is, Inspector, for what it's worth."

"Thanks," Sands said, glancing at the handle. "D.O.R. is Dinah O'Shaughnessy Revel, I gather?"

Revel nodded. "Yes. I took it out of her room. It seems she was strongly attached to Williams and I didn't want anything to happen."

"She and Williams were engaged," Sands said.

Revel let out a snort. "Don't kid me. Williams was engaged to half-a-dozen women and Dinah isn't one of them."

"She thought she was."

Revel was staring at him incredulously. "Listen," he said. "Dinah may have thought she was in love with Williams but she didn't think he'd marry her. Dinah's too smart for that."

"The smart girls are no harder to fool than the rest of them," Sands said. "We'll skip that for now. I am requesting everyone to go into the drawing room to answer some questions. You might go there now, Revel, and start cooking up the story you want me to swallow."

"What story?" Revel said.

Sands was going up the stairs. He

said something over his shoulder that sounded like "Knaves or fools."

It was nearly seven o'clock by the time the members of the household took their places in the drawing room.

There had been no protests except from Mrs. Hogan, the cook. Most of them realized that Sands had been as lenient as he could be under the circumstances.

Even Mrs. Hogan's protests were half-hearted and concerned with the fact that dinner would be late and three stuffed chickens languished in the warming oven. Besides, as Mrs. Hogan explained carefully to Sands, if a body minded her own business and tended to her job properly, she had no time to go around shooting at people.

"I'm sorry," Sands said mildly. "I don't think you did shoot anyone, but my unsupported opinion doesn't weigh with my superiors."

Mrs. Hogan, who had occasionally attended the Communist meetings in Queen's Park before the war, was vaguely comforted by the fact that even the inspector had a boss.

"Go ahead," Mrs. Hogan said tersely. "I'll answer any questions that don't infringe on me rights as an individual."

"Thank you," Sands said. "When you are preparing meals in the kitchen, do you keep the kitchen doors closed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you doing between six and six-thirty o'clock this evening?"

"Working."

"Anyone with you in the kitchen?"

Mrs. Hogan nodded her head toward Hilda, who was standing beside the door.

"She was getting in the way as usual."

Hilda regarded her stonily and said nothing.

"Is that right?" Sands asked her sharply.

"YEAH, it's right," Hilda said. "Except about getting in her way. I was just putting away some clean tea towels. After that I went up to my room to put on my other uniform."

"And to fuss yourself up a bit," Mrs. Hogan put in.

"What time was that, Hilda?"

"I guess about a quarter after six."

"See anyone in the hall on your way up?"

"Her." She pointed at Jane. "She was just going into her room."

Aspasia sat up, stiff and dignified. "Hilda, I realize you entertain certain malicious thoughts about—"

"But I *was* going into my room!" Jane protested. "I was going in to look for something, something"—her voice dropped to a whisper—"terribly important."

"And what was it?" Sands asked.

"I can't tell you *here*." Her voice was sweet but obstinate. "Anyway, I'd been in the drawing room with Paul when I suddenly thought of something so I went up to my room to find out if I was right."

Prye said dryly, "Yes, she was talking to me in the drawing room from the time that Revel went into the library with you, Inspector. I was aware, too, that she had conceived an idea, but she didn't confide in me."

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Shane said with a sigh. "I haven't the faintest trace of an alibi, I'm afraid. Between six and half past is a very difficult time to account for any day. Most of us wash and dress and things like that because we have dinner at a quarter to seven. You see?"

The Inspector saw. The rest looked rather relieved. Mrs. Hogan and Hilda were sent out to the kitchen to salvage the dinner.

Sands looked pointedly at Revel, who was standing beside the mantel. "You're next, Mr. Revel."

Revel smiled. "Well, after I left you, Inspector, I went up to the room Mrs. Shane kindly allotted to me and began to unpack. That was nearly six, I think. I suppose I spent twenty-five minutes or so in there doing various things. Then I rang for Jackson and asked him which room was being occupied by Dinah. I wanted to have a talk with her."

"That's correct, sir," Jackson told the inspector.

"I rapped on her door," Revel went on, "and called to her but she didn't answer. So I went back to my room and smoked a cigarette."

Sands turned to Dinah. "Did you hear Mr. Revel calling you?"

She was sitting at one end of the chesterfield, her chin resting on her hand. She was staring at the floor and did not look up. Nora moved across the room

and put her hand on Dinah's shoulder.

"Dinah, did you hear George rap on your door?"

She raised her eyes, a little surprised to find everyone watching her.

"I heard him," she said in a tight voice. "I heard him."

"Thank you, Dinah," Revel said dryly.

She glanced over at him.

"Don't thank me. I know why you rapped on my door and called my name. You'd just come upstairs after killing Dennis and you wanted some sort of alibi. With that perverted humor of yours, you thought it would be funny to have *me* give you an alibi because Dennis loved me. We were going to be married."

"Shut up," Revel said. "Say what you want to about me but don't humiliate yourself."

"Have you any basis for such an accusation, Mrs. Revel?" Sands asked her.

"I *know* him," Dinah cried. "I know what he's capable of."

Jackson said smoothly, "Mr. Revel was in his room when I came upstairs. He had been unpacking. He asked me where Mrs. Revel's room was. I told him, and I saw him go down the hall and rap."

Dinah was gazing at him bitterly. "You're like the rest of them. You'd slit a throat for money."

"Oh, I think you're *horrible*, Dinah!" Jane exclaimed.

THE ROOM was very still. Sands had withdrawn from the scene and was standing by the door watching them all with an ironic half smile.

A blush was beginning to spread over Jane's face. "What I mean is, you really shouldn't accuse people, Dinah, just because you don't like them."

"I haven't begun yet," Dinah said slowly. "You can squawk when your turn comes."

"My turn?" Jane looked pale and thoroughly frightened but she spoke with a show of defiance: "If Duncan were here you couldn't talk to me like that!"

"If Duncan were here," Sands interrupted softly, "I wouldn't be. But he isn't and I am."

Dinah walked over to the window. Jane began to whimper into Aspasia's far-from-capacious bosom.

"I apologize for my nieces' manners," Mrs. Shane said to the inspector. "They are both young."

"*She's* twenty-nine!" Jane wailed.

Sands looked at her as he thought Duncan might have looked under similar circumstances and she ducked her head back to Aspasia.

Surprised and pleased with himself, Sands turned to Mrs. Shane very graciously. "And what were you doing, Mrs. Shane, between six and half past?"

Mrs. Shane looked thoughtful. As far as she knew she was just doing what she always did at that time, lying down, then washing, changing her clothes, and combing her hair.

"Alone?"

"Alone," she replied, "except when Aspasia came in and asked me what time it was. Her clock had stopped. I told her it was six twenty-five."

Sands' eyes switched to Aspasia. "And then?"

"I went back to my room and set my clock." Aspasia said, twitching her chin away from Jane's hair. "And just as I was setting it I had the most frightful feeling."

"The inspector wants facts not feelings," her sister reminded her briskly.

"Both," Sands said.

Aspasia cast a triumphant glance around the room. "You see? Feelings are important. I finished dressing as quickly as I could and went downstairs. In the hall I met Jackson. He was coming from the basement and he looked frightfully upset."

Jackson frowned at her. Me upset? he thought. I didn't turn a hair.

"He wouldn't tell me anything except that someone was dead. Naturally I thought it was Jane—"

Jane's head came up with a jerk. "Naturally!" she yelled. "Why? Oh dear, you mean you feel that something is going to happen to me? O God! I want protection. I won't stay here another—"

Sands tried the Duncan look again, without result this time. He waited helplessly while Aspasia poured reassurances into Jane's ear. Nora saved the situation by beginning to scream out the details of her actions:

"I WAS IN MY ROOM UNTIL ABOUT SIX-TEN. THEN I WENT DOWNSTAIRS AND TALKED TO DR. PRYE IN THE DRAWING ROOM UNTIL I HEARD ABOUT DENNIS BEING SHOT."

Jane was quieter now.

"All right," Sands said. "Now about Mr. Williams himself. I want to know everything he did from the time he came back to this house. Who let him in?"

"I did," Jackson said. "It was about half an hour before Dr. Prye and Mr. Revel arrived, about four-thirty, I'd say. He had his two bags with him and gave them to me to take up to his room. He said he'd changed his mind about going back to Montreal, and he felt he could do some good by staying here. I took his bags up to the third floor, hung up his suits, and came down. He was standing in the hall on the second floor. He told me he was going down to practice some billiard shots. The last I saw of him alive was when he went down the steps. That was nearly five o'clock."

"What was he doing on the second floor?" Sands asked.

"I don't know," Jackson said.

Without taking her eyes from the window, Dinah said tonelessly, "He came to my room and told me he had come back because he didn't want me to go through everything alone."

Revel let out a strangled laugh. "'Go through everything alone!' Perfect! Wonderful!" He walked over to Dinah and grabbed her shoulder. "You bloody little fool!"

IX

IT WAS the first time Inspector Sands had ever tried to manage a roomful of people. Sands' special talents were usually employed on special jobs; he had never handled a gangster but he was used on cases involving the middle and upper classes. He soothed old ladies who were afraid of being poisoned, he talked to young men who signed other names than their own on checks, and businessmen whose stores burned down too conveniently, and society women whose jewels mysteriously disappeared after paste substitutes had been made.

But his tactics were the quiet kind and they were futile in Dinah Revel's case. She was screaming invectives so shrilly that Sands almost missed the knock on the door. He hurried toward it, grateful for the interruption.

By the time he came back Dinah had run through her repertoire of epithets and was sitting with her back to the others, looking out of the window again.

Sands said, "Jackson, I haven't your complete story."

Jackson, who had been both pleased and shocked at the scene, tried to create the impression that he was a man of the world by shrugging his shoulders casually.

"My story is a little confused. I move around the house a great deal in the course of my duties. Shortly before six I began to arrange the silver and china for dinner. I was doing this when Mr. Revel rang for me. He asked me where Mrs. Revel's room was and I told him. I then returned to the dining room until you rang for me to fetch Mr. Williams. I went down to the billiard room and found him dead. That was a little after six-thirty."

"You had not been down to the billiard room before that time?"

"No, sir."

"Who built the fire in the grate?"

"I assume Mr. Williams did."

Sands reached in his pocket and brought out the gun.

"Have you ever seen this gun before, Jackson?"

Aspasia gave a genteel shriek at the word "gun." Sands walked slowly around the room holding the gun in front of each of them. They all shook their heads. Sands derived nothing from their eyes.

He paused in front of Jane. She looked at the gun, her eyes wide with fright. "That's—that's Duncan's gun," she whispered. "It's the one he always carried."

"Why did he carry a gun?" Sands asked. There was no hope in his voice. None of them knew this Duncan, he thought. They tell me a few isolated facts about him but they can't piece him together for me. He bought a rattlesnake, he wrote a letter to Revel, he wore blue silk underwear, he wanted to marry Nora Shane. He had bullied his sister and picked out her friends, but she adored him and she wore a mink coat. He came from a good family and

he had a lot money, but he carried a loaded revolver.

"I don't know," Jane said. "I guess he just liked to carry one. Duncan didn't explain himself to anyone. He just *did* things. He wasn't like other people."

"All right," Sands said. "I'm sorry to have delayed your dinner, Mrs. Shane."

"We didn't mind," Mrs. Shane lied gallantly. "Won't you stay and have dinner with us?"

"No, no, thanks. I have work to do. I am leaving a man here. If any of you has any additional information tell him and he'll get in touch with me."

He remained at the door while the others went out. Jane was the last to go.

"Miss Stevens," he said. "You had something to tell me privately?"

She looked around carefully before replying. There was no one within earshot but she moved closer to Sands and spoke in a whisper:

"Yes, I have. You remember that letter that Dr. Prye received shortly before the wedding? I know you think Duncan wrote it but he *did not*."

"I don't know who wrote it," Sands said evenly. "In many respects the handwriting was similar to your brother's."

"It wasn't in the least—"

"THE GENERAL appearance was different, that is, the slant of the letters, but that's what I expect when an amateur tries to disguise his handwriting—a difference in the general appearance but similarities in formation of letters, spacing, punctuation, margin widths, general set-up. It looks as if your brother wrote the letter."

Jane was astounded. "I'm telling you he did *not*, and all you do is argue with me!"

"Not arguing," Sands said patiently. "Giving you my point of view, telling you that I have reasons for my belief in order to warn you that I shall expect reasons for yours."

"I have reasons," she said, nodding. "I keep all Duncan's letters, in fact, I keep everybody's letters."

She paused, and Sands nodded gravely, thinking, in fact you would; you tie them up with blue ribbons and I'm standing here talking to you on an empty stomach.

"—more or less souvenirs," Jane was saying. "Well, when I saw that letter to Dr. Prye I thought at the time it sounded half familiar, if you know what I mean. I mean, it sounded like something I'd heard or read before. Then this afternoon, while I was in the drawing room talking to Dr. Prye, I suddenly remembered. And what's more I know *why* I remembered."

"Let's have what you remembered first," Sands suggested.

"Of course. It was a letter Duncan wrote to me from Detroit. I'd forwarded the invitation to Nora's wedding to the Hotel Statler there, and the letter he wrote back to me is the one I'm talking about."

"When was this?"

"Oh, around the end of August. It wasn't a very long letter. He said he was looking forward to attending the wedding although weddings and funerals were so much alike it was high time someone combined the two."

"I have always been intrigued," Sands quoted, "by the funereal aspect of weddings and the hymeneal aspect of funerals. It is high time someone combined the two."

"That's it!" Jane cried. "Those were his very words. Duncan liked to talk like that, to say rather shocking things that he didn't really mean. The reason I remembered the letter when I was talking to Dr. Prye is that Dr. Prye was mentioned in the letter. Duncan wanted to know who and what he was." She giggled. "Duncan said he sounded like a gossip columnist: 'I Spy' by Dr. Prye. Anyway, as soon as I thought of the letter I went right upstairs."

Sands was gentle with her. "I'm afraid you haven't proved your brother didn't write the letter to Prye. To the contrary, I'd say. Some people go on repeating phrases indefinitely if they're fond of their own words."

"I haven't finished," she said softly. "I went upstairs to get that letter and *it was gone.*"

Sands was staring at her. She's right, of course, he thought. I've never actually believed Duncan wrote that letter to Prye.

"Tell me about it," he said; "where you kept it."

"I had a pile of letters in the drawer of my bureau, tied with ribbon."

"Drawer locked?"

"There is no lock on it."

"Anything else disturbed?"

She looked upset. "I don't know. I don't think so."

"I'll see about it."

He went down the hall and exchanged some words with the uniformed policeman sitting near the entrance to the basement. The policeman walked upstairs and Sands came back.

"Aren't you going to *do* anything?" Jane cried.

"I'm going to eat," Sands said. "You'd better eat, too."

She walked toward the dining room with an air of offended dignity and went inside. Sands collected his hat and opened the front door. He stood on the top step, pulling the collar of his coat up around his neck.

THE AIR was thick with fog, as if a giant spider had spun his web across the city. The last bedraggled leaves were falling from the trees with soft sighs of protest.

He walked down the steps, drawing the spider's web into his lungs. It came out of his mouth like ectoplasm from the mouth of a spirit. As he moved, the mist moved away from him, separating, drawing together again behind him. He walked in the small cleared space like a shadowy king.

"Ah, thank you, thank you," he said. "I am honored."

The fog smothered his voice and swallowed his smile. Uneasy, he quickened his pace. He was light and heavy and quick and dull. He was the last man on earth moving into the spirit world; he was hungry, and there was nothing to eat but ectoplasm. . . .

His car stepped out of the fog. The feel of the wheel in his hands made him real again. He put his foot on the starter, grinning with relief, letting the motor roar. Then he bent his head to take a last look up at the house.

The room above the drawing room was showing a light. The room was Duncan's and the key to it was in Sand's pocket. As he watched, a figure came between the light and the drawn curtains.

There was a woman in Duncan's room,

in front of the bureau. She was crouching, she was opening the drawers, looking for something, and she was in a hurry.

Sands got out of his car and walked quickly to the house, thinking, maybe she wants to borrow those damned blue pajamas. He held his finger on the bell and waited, stamping his feet impatiently on the doormat.

Jackson opened the door. "Oh. I thought you'd gone, sir."

"Yes," Sands said. "Is everyone in the dining room?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Revel went up to her room. She didn't want any dinner."

"And Hilda?"

"Hilda is in the kitchen having her dinner."

"Mrs. Revel is taking Mr. Williams' death very badly, isn't she?"

Jackson looked puzzled. "Yes, sir. It's what you'd expect. I understand how she feels. I was engaged myself once."

"Oh," Sands said. "And the young lady died?"

Jackson grinned. "No, sir. She said she'd see me in hell first. Women are funny."

"I have never married," Sands said. He turned around and went down the steps.

The light in Duncan's room was out by the time he reached his car. He got in and headed toward Bloor Street.

He had intended to go home and broil himself a steak and go to bed. But he was no longer very hungry. On Bloor he stopped at a White Spot and had a hamburger and some coffee and a piece of pie. When he had finished he made a call on the pay telephone and came back to pay his check, smiling.

Fifteen minutes later he was in the library of Commissioner of Police Day.

The library and the commissioner had points in common: they were both large and comfortable and they both made Sands uncomfortable.

Day smiled a greeting. "Don't apologize for disturbing me, Sands," he said affably.

Sands, who had no intention of apologizing, said, "Thank you, sir. It's very kind of you. Have you read my report on the Stevens affair?"

"Sad," Day said. "Very sad. The

young man was slightly drunk, lost his balance, and fell down the steps."

"I don't think so," Sands said.

DAY SMILED indulgently. "I remember when I was an inspector I took a very grim view indeed of such accidents. I don't blame you, Sands. When you have a headache an oculist will tell you it's your eyes and a psychoanalyst will tell you it's your repressions. Similarly, a policeman is likely to consider an accident murder. It's only natural."

"In this case, very natural," Sands said dryly. "Another man was killed about six o'clock. In the same house. With Stevens' revolver."

The commissioner's smile faded and he assumed his why-does-everything-happen-to-me? expression. He said, "Another American?"

"No. He was in a broker's office in Montreal."

"Well, that's something," Day said with a sigh. "We can't afford to have Americans murdered in Canada. It creates bad feeling, especially at such a critical time. I suppose you're sure this American, Stevens, was murdered?"

"Quite sure. If you've read my report carefully you'll see that."

The commissioner reached in his humidor for a cigar. "You are irritatingly superior, Sands. I *did* read your report carefully. I read everything carefully."

"Yes, sir."

"There were, I grant, a number of confusing side-issues in the case, considerable hocus-pocus with letters and what not, but the main issue is clear. A drunken man fell and was killed."

"And the loaded revolver he was carrying at the time evaporated," Sands said.

"So," Day said.

"So. That wasn't in the report. Your mistake was a natural one, Commissioner, and I don't blame you." Sands' voice was smug. "I came over here merely to get your opinion on the case, but if you have no opinion I'd better be going."

"Oh, sit down," the commissioner said irritably. "Of course, I have an opinion. I always have an opinion." He paused weightily. "It is my opinion that this Stevens was a crook. You had better take a plane to Boston tomorrow morning and

find out more about his strange business."

"I dislike planes," Sands said.

"Come, come! You'll have to be more progressive—"

"I get airsick."

"And while you're in Boston you might look into the records of this man Jackson. An odd coincidence that he should come from Boston."

"He came to Toronto to join the R.C.A.F.," Sands explained. "They turned him down and he had no money to get back to his home so he took a domestic job."

"Find out about Stevens' money, if he made a will and who benefits. I suppose you have Horton working on the letter written to this Dr. Prye?"

"I have," Sands said. "I'll ring him up now if I may."

"Go ahead."

SANDS WENT to the table and in two minutes was talking to Horton, the police department's graphologist. "How about the two letters I sent you?" Sands asked.

"I got it all written up for you," Horton said. "I'm on my way to dinner. Good-by."

"Good-by. Were they written by the same person?"

"No. Be a good boy and hang up, Sands. I'm hungry. Go away."

"The commissioner wouldn't like it," Sands said. "I'm at his house now."

"Great Scott," Horton said. "Why didn't you tell me? All right. Pay close attention. There were many similarities between the two letters and after a casual glance I decided that they were both written by the same person, the letter beginning 'Dear George' being the normal writing of this person and the letter beginning 'Dr. Prye' being a disguised writing. However, I put my gadgets to work and now all is clear. The person who wrote the letter to Dr. Prye has a normal handwriting which is similar to the writing on the letter to dear George, which is the normal writing of whoever wrote it. Get it?"

"No."

"Well, I can't help that."

"Try again. Call them A and B."

"Sure. A and B are two people who've

been to the same boarding school and have learned to write under the same master. That is, they write similarly. That ought to be clear. A wrote a letter to Dr. Prye, trying to disguise the writing. B wrote a letter to dear George in a normal, undisguised handwriting. Both A and B are female."

Sands shouted, "What?"

"Surprise," Horton said. "Either they're females or damn close to it. I can't tell definitely by the writing. How could I? Sometimes you can hardly tell when you see them."

"Don't be coarse."

"The hungrier I get the coarser I get. Do I hang up now?"

"You do," Sands said. "Leave your report in my office."

Sands hung up and turned back to the commissioner. Day was frowning disapprovingly toward the telephone.

"Horton is inclined to be insubordinate," he said. "What does he say?"

Sands told him.

Day yawned. Why couldn't people behave themselves, especially on the Sabbath? "All right, Sands. Is that all? Have you any men posted in Mrs. Shane's house?"

"One."

"Good. We can't afford to have any more Americans murdered."

"I know that," Sands said coldly. "Maybe I can dig up a couple of Ukrainians for you."

Day smiled pleasantly. "Same old Sands." He escorted Sands to the door, talking affably. Sands went out to his car.

Same old commissioner, he thought sadly.

X

DINAH WAS the first one down for breakfast the next morning. Jackson was plugging in the percolator when she came in. He straightened up and gave her a deferential smile but his eyes were a little surprised. It was only eight o'clock for one thing, and she was dressed to go out. For another, she seemed to have forgotten the past forty-eight hours. She looked almost the same as on the day she had arrived, her thin mouth fixed in a permanent half smile, her eyes narrowed and knowing and cold.

She wore a yellow wool dress with a brown belt tight around her waist. Her hair was combed back from her smooth white forehead.

"The usual, Jackson," she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Revel."

On his way to the kitchen he passed behind her chair and looked down at her. He could see the layers of powder on her face and the skin under her eyes like gray-white crepe paper. He was a little shocked.

When he came back with her orange juice he said, "Lovely morning, isn't it?"

She looked out of the window. An uncertain sun was feeling its way down through the thin air. She turned her eyes away.

"I don't like the fall," she said. "It's lonely. It's like death."

Jackson laughed. He wanted the laugh to tell her that he understood exactly but that it was an absurd idea. He wanted it to tell her to forget Williams, who was a bum, and to realize that he, Jackson, was a very remarkable fellow.

It didn't do any of these things. It sounded like a giggle and Dinah's voice cut through it: "What's funny?"

"I— Nothing. I was simply being agreeable," he said lamely. "I wanted to cheer you up."

"One sure way not to cheer me up is to giggle in my ear, Jackson. Let's get that settled."

"Yes, Mrs. Revel."

He poured her coffee and handed it to her silently. She lit a cigarette and watched him through the smoke.

"You don't belong here, Jackson."

Jackson was very polite. "No, madam."

"Why are you here?"

"Three square meals and a bed, madam. And I find the work congenial."

"I suppose you write poetry in your off hours, or movie scripts or novels all about life as it never has been and never will be lived."

Jackson thought of the half-finished novel locked in a drawer of his bureau and his "No, madam," was not convincing.

But Dinah was paying no attention anyway.

"Realism," she said. "Sometimes I think some of these so-called realistic novelists have never been outside the house except perhaps to empty the garbage."

They see other people doing the same thing and decide that that's all there is to life. That's the way their stuff seems to me, at any rate. Just well-pawed-over garbage—"

There was a gasp from the doorway. Jane was standing there with her mouth open and her eyes widened, and, Dinah thought cynically, with her ears pricked up.

"Dinah! Honestly!" She came into the room with indignant little bounces. "What will Jackson—? I mean, hadn't you better—? Oh, dear!"

SHE SAT down, exhausted from the effort of trying to express herself, and told Jackson in a very cold voice that she was not at all hungry and he was to omit the bacon from her usual breakfast.

Jackson went out.

"You eat like a bird, my love," Dinah said silkily. "A robin, for instance. Do you know that a robin will eat sixteen feet of earthworms in a day? Someone told me that once. I thought it only goes to show, doesn't it?"

"Sixteen feet? Really?" Jane sipped her grapefruit juice thoughtfully.

Dinah leaned across the table.

"Jane," she said, "I know you're dumb. But how dumb? That's what I keep asking myself: How dumb is Jane?"

"Honestly, I never—"

"Is she, I ask myself, dumb enough not to know that Duncan was smuggling something across the border in his luggage to hand over to Revel?"

"Smuggling?" Jane repeated, frowning. "Oh, you must be crazy, Dinah. Duncan had plenty of money. He had no need to smuggle anything anywhere."

"Maybe he wasn't doing it for money. Maybe he wanted some excitement. God knows if I had to look at that dead pan of yours every day I'd want some excitement, too."

"You've had your excitement!" Jane cried. "You've disgraced the whole family with your dreadful marriage."

"It was dreadful," Dinah said softly, "but it *was* a marriage."

When Jackson came back he found them glaring at each other silently. He said, "I hope you find your egg satisfactory, Miss Stevens."

She started and glanced down at the plate in front of her. "It's fine," she said. "Thank you."

A short time later Prye appeared, exchanged greetings, and sat down beside Jane.

"You look spry," Dinah observed.

"I should. I'm trying hard," Prye said, grinning. "Every morning when I wake up I remind myself that I am thirty-eight and that it becomes increasingly difficult to look spry as one ages. So I hop out of bed, attach my smile, and look spry."

"Are you really?" Jane said.

Prye looked at her in surprise. "Am I what?"

"Thirty-eight."

"At least thirty-eight," Prye said solemnly.

"How does it feel?" Jane asked.

"It feels like eighteen," Prye said. "I'm still trying to decide what I'll be when I grow up."

"If you grow up," Dinah said.

Prye smiled at her. "Claws all sharpened up this morning, Dinah?"

"Dinah is in a vile mood," Jane said sadly. "I don't see why we can't all be pleasant to each other. I'm sure I've suffered more than anyone has and I'm not being unpleasant. Live and let live, I say."

"An unfortunate phrase," Dinah said. "As most of your phrases are."

Jackson placed a rack of fresh toast on the table and went out again.

"If Jackson doesn't take to blackmail," Prye said, "it won't be from lack of material. We'll all have to be more careful of our words."

Jane put down her toast and drew a deep breath. "I agree with you. Dinah's too—too informal. She was telling Jackson about garbage when I came in."

"Cheer up," Prye said. "Maybe he'll pass it on to you."

Jane got up from the table and faced them both accusingly. "Do you know what I think?"

"No," Prye said.

"I think you're all *mean*, just plain *mean*!"

She swept out of the room and slammed the door behind her.

"So do I," Prye said. "I feel rather

mean this morning. Do you feel mean?"

"Quite," Dinah said.

"It's probably the weather. Or the toast. I have a theory about this toast. Want to hear it?"

"Not much."

"Well, Mrs. Hogan makes it before she goes to bed and leaves it out all night to air."

"It wouldn't surprise me," Dinah said.

SHE STUBBED her cigarette in her saucer and got to her feet. She didn't walk away, but stood, hesitating, gazing down at him for some time.

"My dear Dinah," Prye said finally, "I can't stand people who stand around watching other people eat. It makes me feel coarse and unspiritual. If you have anything to say, say it. I guarantee an answer."

She said, "Are you an honest man, Prye?"

"Oh hell," Prye said, shaken. "This is my most embarrassing moment."

"You guaranteed an answer. Remember?"

"Very well. I think I'm pretty honest, in most things, in my profession, in my relations with my friends, about money—"

"And about facts, unpleasant ones?"

Prye smiled ironically. "I recognize unpleasant facts when they confront me but I haven't your zest for going around hunting them. What are you leading up to?"

"The murderer," she said. "I want the murderer to hang."

"The customary end for murderers in your country, I believe," Prye said. "What has my honesty to do with anything?"

"I want you to help me investigate. But, you see, it just might turn out to be someone you like, and you might not want a hanging."

"True."

"Can you honestly say that you want the truth to come out no matter what it is?"

"No," Prye said.

She put her hand on his shoulder. "I thought not. You may be honest but you don't carry it too far? I see."

"Honesty," Prye said, "is the word most frequently used or misused by the superior

type of neurotic. The neurotic is fundamentally dishonest. His very personality is dependent on a confounding of issues. Hence the repetition of the word 'honesty'—"

Dinah was not listening. "You have a reputation for snooping, but I notice you've been very quiet these days, very subdued. You aren't sticking your nose into people's drawers or tapping walls or tearing around in your stocking feet in the middle of the night."

"I never have," Prye said. "I always use running shoes in case of nails on the floor."

"So my guess is you know who killed Duncan and Dennis and you're not telling."

"I don't know."

"And you know *why* they were killed."

"Yes," Prye said. "But Sands knows, too. I'm not holding anything back."

"Are you going to help me?"

He was silent, his eyes resting on her speculatively. "No, I'm not," he said finally. "Because I'm not sure you didn't kill them yourself."

She was not offended. She merely turned away with a sigh. "I see." She went out.

Shortly afterward the doorbell rang and Jackson came through the dining room to answer it. Prye could hear men talking in the hall. Their voices were loud and slightly belligerent, as if they were nervous underneath and would not admit it. When Jackson came back his face was white with anger.

"What's up?" Prye asked him.

"Three plain-clothes men," Jackson said. "They've got a search warrant."

"That's to be expected. Sands with them?"

"No, sir. What do they expect to find in this house? It's an imposition."

WONDER what he's got hidden in his room that he doesn't want found, Prye thought. A diary, perhaps. Or some letters, or a collection of French photographs.

"They won't read your correspondence," Prye said. "They're after something weightier." He paused. "You know something, Jackson? When anyone says anything that interests you your ears wiggle. Honestly. It's quite pronounced."

Jackson put one hand up to his ear, blushing.

"Another argument for evolution," Prye went on.

"I think," Jackson said, "that you're baiting me, and I don't like it."

"I'm trying to make you angry, Jackson, so you'll make some off-the-record remarks you wouldn't make otherwise. But I guess that won't work. You Harvard men are too casual. You dress casually and talk casually and get casual haircuts. I often wonder where all this casualness is going to lead us."

"So you think I'm holding out on you?" Jackson said bitterly. "To hell with you. You gave me twenty bucks yesterday to report a telephone call. Well, here's your twenty. Now forget it. From now on—"

"I hate gestures," Prye said. "Keep the twenty. Sorry I misjudged you."

He went to the door and turned around with a dry smile. "*If* I misjudged you."

In the hall he saw two of the plain-clothes men on the way upstairs. The third, a tall, gangling young man, was standing on tiptoe peering behind a gilt-framed oil painting. He had his back to Prye.

"Looking for pixies?" Prye said pleasantly.

The man jerked around and stuck out his chin. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"The man is Prye, tough child. Dr. Prye."

"Oh." The man seemed embarrassed. "Well, I've got a message for you from Inspector Sands. He had to go to Boston."

"What's the message?"

The man looked cautiously up and down the hall and edged closer to Prye. "He said you could save him some trouble by getting handwriting samples from everyone in the house. He said you're to be subtle."

"Did Sands say that? The dog. I'm always subtle."

"Those were his very words, 'be subtle.' He said to make a game of it, you know, like charades."

"Sands," Prye said, "is losing his grip. 'You don't get handwriting samples by playing charades.'"

"He says so," the man repeated. "He says, too, if you don't want to co-operate you don't have to, but if you don't he'll have to get the samples by stealth or force."

"I put my money on stealth. That's all he said, eh? When will he be back?"

"Tonight."

"I'll get them," Prye said coldly; "but Sands or no Sands you don't get handwriting samples by playing charades."

"He says so," the young man repeated, and walked away toward the basement.

For the next two hours the Shane household found stray policemen in the most unexpected places.

Aspasia came upon one in her bathroom and promptly burst into tears. Jane, in a spirit of sweet helpfulness, attached herself to the policeman who searched her room. After falling over her several times the policeman escorted her firmly to the door and told her to go away.

Saddened and bewildered by this lack of appreciation, Jane drifted into the drawing room. Nora was at the piano idly picking out some mournful chords. Revel was sitting in a chair by the window holding a book. His eyes were closed.

"Hello," Jane said. "I think policemen are horrid. One of them just *shoved* me."

REVEL opened his eyes and said, "The brute. Tell us all about it. Was it a hard shove? And in what spirit was the deed performed? Playful or sinister?"

"Oh, George," Jane said reproachfully.

"Don't mind him," Nora said. "George has a bad conscience this morning."

Revel smiled. "It isn't so bad. I've made certain necessary adjustments of the truth but my hands are bloodless."

"Rather a pity," Nora said. "If true. You know, I can't say I'm very fond of you, George. I think you know why."

"Dinah," Revel said.

Nora nodded. "Yes, she's changed a lot in the past few years."

"That couldn't have been her fault, of course?"

"The judge thought not."

"Judges," Revel said, "don't know everything. And, I'm sorry to be ungallant, neither do you."

He flung his book down and went out. Jane stared after him with puzzled eyes.

"Oh dear!" she cried. "What is the matter with everyone? Whatever anyone says around here seems to have two meanings. When I say something it hasn't got two meanings."

"You're damn lucky if it's got one," Nora said. "Oh, wake up, Jane! We've had two murders in this house. Our nerves are on edge. Don't take everything we say literally. We're just working off steam."

"Why does everybody have to work off steam on me?" Jane wailed. "What have I done?"

Nora got up from the piano and went over and patted Jane's plump shoulder.

"You haven't done anything," she said soothingly. "You're just the victim type. Some are and some aren't. You are."

"It's not fair. I always try to be pleasant. I never say mean things to anybody. Why, I never even think mean things about anybody."

"That," Nora said, "is the trouble. Go on. Think of something mean about me right now."

Jane frowned thoughtfully into space for some time.

"Well," she said finally, "I don't much like your gray dress with the funny pockets. The pockets make you look rather—rather *hippy*, I thought."

Nora sat down abruptly.

"You win," she said.

At that moment Hilda came in the door and strode angrily over to Nora. Her eyes were popping.

"I quit," she announced.

"You did quit, Hilda," Nora said coldly. "It's becoming almost a habit, isn't it?"

"That guy's going through my letters up there. I won't stand for it. I'll scratch his eyes out!"

She was close to tears. Nora said in a kindly voice, "Do, if it will make you feel any better."

"I never murdered anyone," Hilda cried. "Why, I never even stole anything in my whole life. And now that guy's reading my letters."

"That's not a tragedy, is it?" Nora put her arm around the girl's shoulders. "I know you haven't done anything, Hilda."

Nora guided her out of the door, talking steadily. A policeman was coming down the stairs. He walked aggressively toward Nora.

"What's in that big box in your room? It's locked and I can't find a key."

"I'm a secret drinker," Nora said. "That's where I keep my empty bottles."

The policeman grunted. "I'm not getting much help around here. The inspector'll hear about this."

"It's a shame," Nora said. "And you so sweet and pleasant. The box is a cedar chest."

"You mean a hope chest?"

"If you really crave accuracy," Nora said, "call it a blasted-hope chest."

"And the key?"

"Third drawer in my bureau under some pink silk pants."

The policeman blushed and said, "Oh, there?"

He turned on his heel and went back up the stairs. For lack of anything interesting to do Nora followed him up. In the hall on the second floor they came upon Prye explaining to the tall, gangling young man that what the police lacked was System.

"You should," Prye said, "begin at the top and work down."

"Or begin at the bottom," Nora said helpfully, "and work up. It amounts to the same thing. Or you might even try working both ends against the middle."

THERE WAS another exchange of glances between the policemen. The older one sighed and said, "Sorry, but the inspector told me if I encountered any resistance I was to put you all together in a room and get on with my work."

"So it's come to this," Nora said.

"It has," the policeman assured her grimly. "Are you going downstairs peacefully?"

"We certainly are," Nora said.

When they reached the drawing room they found Jane still curled up in a chair. She had obviously been pondering on her conversation with Nora, for her opening remark was:

"What do you mean, I am a victim type? It sounds silly to me."

Prye, sensing a battle, withdrew to the windows.

"Nothing," Nora said, sinking into a chair. "Sorry I broached the subject."

"Well!" Jane sat up indignantly. "But you did broach it. What am I a victim of, I'd like to know?"

"I apologized, didn't I?"

"Well, I should hope so. Duncan always said that it was an extremely rude

thing to insult a guest in your home."

Nora sniffed. "Duncan. If you don't stop quoting Duncan, you—"

"I wandered lonely as a cloud," Prye said loudly. "'That floats on high o'er vales and hills.'"

"—wretched little—"

"When all at once I saw a crowd,

"A host, of golden daffodils.'"

"—daffodil!"

"Daffodil!" Jane shrieked.

"Girls," Prye said. "The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year."

A voice from the doorway said, "What in the hell is going on here?" and Dinah came in, looking from one to the other inquiringly. Aspasia and Mrs. Shane were right behind her.

"We were having a spot of poetry," Prye said easily.

"How nice!" Aspasia said warmly. "Jennifer, remember how Father used to recite Yeats to us?"

Mrs. Shane glanced dryly at Prye. "I had no idea you were fond of poetry, Paul. Don't let us interrupt you."

"The spell is broken," Prye said.

Jane gave a loud, vigorous snort.

"One feels suddenly like quoting poetry," Prye explained, "and then, quite as suddenly, one feels like not quoting poetry."

"I see," Mrs. Shane said mildly. "That exhausts the subject as far as I'm concerned. Shall we have some bridge while we're waiting for the policemen to finish?"

"Oh, no *thinking* game, please," Aspasia pleaded. "Honestly, I'm so upset. I walked into the bathroom and there he was. Revolting! He snarled at me."

"*I was shoved!*" Jane said in a tone of delicate superiority.

"You've both been badly used," Dinah said. "I suggest that you write letters to the Prime Minister about the whole dastardly episode. Meanwhile, the rest of us can play bridge."

"Charades," Prye said.

"Let's *all* write letters to the Prime Minister," Nora said. "Get everything off our chests. Then we'll tear them up, of course."

"Disloyal," Aspasia muttered.

Dinah turned to Jane. "Can you read and write, you darling?"

"I am not speaking to you," Jane announced. "And anyway I don't know who the Prime Minister is, and I don't care to

play such nasty games. Unless everyone else is playing too. I'm sure I'm the last person to spoil anyone else's fun."

The next half-hour was filled with quiet activity. The only sound in the room was the cracking of Jane's pencil between her teeth.

An hour later, while Inspector Sands was in Boston talking to the most beautiful blonde he'd ever seen, Prye was in his room reading five letters to the Prime Minister. One of these he singled out and studied for some time. The writing was so similar to Duncan's that it might have passed for his.

The letter was signed Dinah Revel.

Dinah, Prye thought. It might have been Dinah who wrote the letter beginning Dear George. Dinah was seen coming out of Duncan's room . . .

No, it wasn't possible. Dinah and Duncan were cousins. The handwriting of relatives tends to be similar.

"Besides, I like her," Prye said.

Funny, he thought, I'm doing what Dinah herself was afraid I'd do, making excuses for someone because I like her.

XI

AT ELEVEN forty-five on Monday morning Inspector Sands was in Boston, Dr. Prye was studying handwriting, and Sammy Twist was knocking off work to have lunch.

Later, Prye and Sands were to know Sammy quite well, but Sammy never became aware of them.

He shut the door of his elevator, hung up his "Use the Next Elevator Please" sign, reported to Mr. Jones at the desk, and went downstairs to have his lunch.

He was twenty, but he was small, thin, and quick, and he looked younger than his age. His youth and his ready grin earned him more than his share of tips, but a great deal of his money was spent on horses. He knew a lot about horses, so much that he was too subtle in picking his winners and most of them didn't win.

The members of the hotel staff who saw Sammy on Monday swore to a man that he was exactly the same as he always was, friendly and a little sly. He carried his racing form down to lunch in the basement and read it while he ate.

What the staff didn't know was that Sammy was not reading very carefully. He was troubled. He had a problem which required advice from someone older and wiser, but he couldn't ask anyone to help him. He'd already used the fifty dollars.

Besides, Sammy thought, the whole thing sounded make believe. He didn't want to make a fool of himself and there'd been nothing in the papers about a Miss Stevens dying. Sammy had been very careful on that point.

The whole thing was a joke. Sammy decided. The letter had said it was a joke. When he got back to his elevator he took the letter from his pocket and stared at it without opening it. The very way it had been delivered to him showed it was a joke, Sammy thought.

It had come last Friday. He had been busy all afternoon and at six he went down to his locker to change into his suit. When he took off his uniform he saw that an envelope had fallen part way out of his coat pocket. There was nothing written on the outside and it was sealed.

He knew it wasn't his; but if it was put in his coat pocket maybe someone meant it for him. How had it gotten there?

Someone must have slipped it into his pocket that afternoon, one of his passengers, any one of them.

Sammy was cautious. He felt the envelope and pressed it and thought of foreign spies and secret plans and designs for bomb sights. What he didn't think of was that someone was giving him a fifty-dollar bill for making one telephone call.

The bill fluttered to the floor. Sammy made a grab for it and put it in his pocket before anyone could come downstairs and see it. He hadn't decided to keep it yet, of course, but it sure felt swell in his pocket.

And all he had to do was to call Toronto General Hospital on Saturday at twelve o'clock and tell them that Miss Stevens was an atropine case. It was, the letter said, a joke on Miss Stevens, and if Sammy did his part and kept quiet about it there was more money in it for him. The writer would communicate with him again.

Sammy did his part because Iron Man was bound to come in tomorrow and fifty split across the board meant big money.

At twelve on Saturday Sammy called the

hospital, at four Iron Man reached the finishing line some seconds later than usual, and at midnight Duncan Stevens was dead.

When Sammy reached his boarding house at seven o'clock on Monday night he received a telephone call which worried him a great deal. While he was wondering what to do about it, Inspector Sands was flying back from Boston and Dr. Prye was putting mint jelly on a slice of roast lamb.

TEMPERS had mellowed somewhat in the Shane house. True, there were still two policemen in the place, and considerable noise was issuing from the cellar where boxes and coal and musty trunks were being hauled around. But at least the searching was over on the upper floors.

"It's a pity," Mrs. Shane observed, "that they don't houseclean while they're at it. We shall have to be upset all over again."

"I'm afraid that won't worry the law," Prye said from the end of the table. "I believe Mr. Revel here could have helped a bit if he'd chosen to do so."

Revel looked up from his plate and blinked. "What's that?"

"I was telling Mrs. Shane that you might have helped with the searching."

"How so?" Revel said lightly.

Dinah said, "If you're thinking of making George admit something, give it up, Paul. George has perfect control and his tongue is so smooth it's going to slip down his throat and choke him one of these days."

Revel grinned at her across the table. "If it does it won't cut my throat the way yours would, Dinah."

"What dreadful ideas you young people get!" Aspasia cried. "If Jennifer or I had said such a thing at home we should have been dismissed from the table immediately, shouldn't we, Jennifer?"

"I shouldn't have been," Mrs. Shane said, smiling. "Father was an old fraud and he knew I knew."

"Your whole generation was a fraud," Dinah said. "Perfect angels outside and Heaven knows what inside. Like children. Children learn hypocrisy easily and early. I remember when I was ten Duncan and I were great pals, but I used to lie awake at nights and plan to murder him."

"Be frank," Prye said, "but try not to be

foolish, Dinah. Sands would like that."

"Well, I did," Dinah went on coolly. "He used to tease me about my hair. Once I decided to leave him in the jungle so the ants would eat him, but the jungle was so far away I never got around to it."

"You always were a little fiend," Mrs. Shane said mildly. "Of course Duncan was too. I used to think the two of you would be a bad influence on Jane."

Jane smiled forgivingly, as if admitting that Dinah and Duncan had been a bad influence but that her own nature was too sweet to be affected.

"Duncan," she said silkily, "turned out very well."

Dinah raised an eyebrow. "He didn't hang, if that's what you mean."

Jane opened her mouth to reply but Prye got there first. "The three of you went to the same school?" he asked casually.

Dinah nodded. "Touching, isn't it? I used to live in Boston until romance snatched me away and set me down in Montreal. I don't have a warm spot in my heart for either place at the moment."

She's talking too much today, Prye thought. It isn't like Dinah. She's too shrewd to let her tongue run away with her.

He looked at her carefully. Her eyes were unnaturally bright and her hands kept moving nervously, tracing the pattern in the tablecloth and smoothing the collar of her yellow dress. Her eyes caught his in a long stare, then she looked away and he saw the pulse beating in her temple. He counted the beats almost automatically.

Over a hundred, Prye thought. She's excited about something.

"I feel safer with a policeman in the house," he said aloud. "It makes a third murder a little more improbable."

"A third murder!" Aspasia repeated. "Oh, please don't talk about it."

"More fraud, you see," Dinah said. "We've had two murders, but we're not supposed to talk about a third."

"That isn't the point at all," Aspasia replied stiffly. "If we think and talk of evil, the evil is that much closer to us."

"Bosh," Dinah said.

Mrs. Shane interrupted tactfully. "It's odd, but evil is something I always associate with modern things. I never remember that there was any when I was a girl.

It's rather a comforting thought at my age. Yet there were Jack the Ripper and Landru, and of course others. And then there was my grandfather who was caught stealing sheep."

"I wish," Nora said gloomily, "that we didn't have to go into that again. To hear you talk you'd think he won the Nobel prize for stealing sheep."

Mrs. Shane was aggrieved. "Really, Nora, I'm only trying to make conversation. When I leave the conversation to the rest of you, you merely exchange insults."

She rang the little bell in front of her plate and Jackson came in.

"Jackson, we'll have coffee in here tonight. Haven't those policemen finished yet?"

"No, madam. They are still in the cellar."

"The cellar! Why should they be in the cellar?"

Dinah leaned toward Mrs. Shane and said, "Have you forgotten about Dennis, Aunt Jennifer? Dennis was murdered in your cellar."

IF SAMMY TWIST had heard this he would have stopped pondering over his telephone call and gone to bed behind a locked door. Instead, he sat in the dining room of his boardinghouse with the evening paper spread on the table in front of him.

There was no mention of anything unusual happening at 197 River Road. A Mr. Duncan Stevens of Boston had met an accidental death while visiting in the city, but Stevens was a common name.

One ninety-seven River Road. Sammy knew that was a residential section. Classy, Sammy called it. He knew, too, that classy people often did crazy things just for a laugh, but they didn't commit crimes. Because if you were classy you didn't have to—

"Going out, Mr. Twist?" his landlady asked with an indifference that didn't fool Sammy.

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe not."

"I just wondered," the landlady said. "Because if you aren't going out I thought I'd slip over to the Adelphi and see Myrna Loy and you could watch Roscoe."

Roscoe was six years old and Sammy did not find him amusing.

"I think I will go out," Sammy said. "On business."

"Oh, that telephone call, eh?" she said brightly. "Peculiar voice, wasn't it? Sort of muffled."

Muffled, Sammy thought. Sure it was, but it was classy just the same.

"He had a cold," he said rather stiffly.

"Your boss?"

Sammy rattled the paper and pretended he hadn't heard her. Until that minute he hadn't thought how the person had learned his name and his telephone number.

Through Mr. Jones at the desk, Sammy decided. That was simple. You walked up and asked Jones who was the guy operating the second elevator from the left.

At eleven o'clock. Why so late? Sammy wondered.

Well, maybe the guy was going some place before that.

"Will you be late?" the landlady asked.

"Twelve, I guess."

"I'll leave the hall light on," she said.

He folded the paper. He had a sudden desire to tell her everything, to ask her what he should do, just in case. In case of what? Sammy shook his head angrily.

"Something bothering you, Mr. Twist?"

"Business worries," Sammy said, scowling.

"Anything I can do?"

Just in case, Sammy thought. "Yes," he said. "I'm going to tell you an address I want you to remember for me. It's 197 River Road."

She wrote it down on the pad beside the telephone.

INSPECTOR SANDS had both hands clasped to his stomach. Not that he felt any better that way but he was afraid that if he took them away he would feel worse. He held his stomach and cursed softly and sadly every time the plane hit an air pocket.

He wanted to read over the notes he had taken during the day but his head felt as if it were caught in a revolving door. He leaned back and thought of the three interviews he had had in Boston.

Mr. Pipe, Duncan Stevens' lawyer, had been cautious. It was not, Sands felt, the caution of a lawyer protecting his client but rather the caution of a man protecting himself.

"Stevens," Mr. Pipe said, rolling the word on his tongue like a piece of alum, "Stevens. Dead, you say? What a sad thing! It grieves me when I see the young meet an untimely end. It doesn't seem to matter so much for old codgers like you and me."

Sands, who was fifty-one, took an instant dislike to Mr. Pipe. "You made his will?"

"He made it," Mr. Pipe said precisely. "I merely assisted. The will is perfectly simple."

"In that case you'll have no difficulty remembering it?" Sands said.

Mr. Pipe smiled sourly. "He leaves everything to his sister Jane. What 'everything' means I have no idea."

"Didn't you handle his affairs?"

"I did, up to a point," Mr. Pipe said. "I handled his father's affairs completely, but young Stevens was a secretive fellow. I know that he keeps an account in the First National."

"Much money?"

"He had a private fortune to begin with," Mr. Pipe went on. "A considerable one. But he was extravagant. How much is left I don't know."

"Any real estate?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Safe-deposit box?"

"Probably," Mr. Pipe agreed.

"This brokerage business he started," Sands said. "As far as you know it was on the level?"

Mr. Pipe pursed his lips and said, "So far as I *know*, yes. I suspect, however, that he conducted the business merely to amuse himself, as a kind of hobby, you understand. Stevens was like that. He tried a number of things, including a racing stable. He thought he could do anything."

Mr. Pipe had not been very helpful, but the manager of the First National branch where Stevens banked was almost too helpful.

"Stevens' account," he told Sands flatly, "is exactly one dollar."

A month previously Stevens had begun to withdraw large sums of money, ranging from five thousand dollars to a final withdrawal of twenty thousand a week and a half ago.

He gave no explanation and the bank

manager had asked for none. He had left one dollar in his account to keep it open.

"Had he ever done this before?" Sands asked.

"Not so mysteriously," the manager said with a smile. "Usually he confided to me the details of some new scheme he had. His account has been going downhill steadily, but these last withdrawals have been preposterous. One dollar left of his father's fortune."

"Perhaps he meant to bring it back doubled."

"He usually meant to," the bank manager said grimly. "I thought of blackmail this time, but a man wouldn't allow himself to be blackmailed out of his whole bank account."

"Which was?"

"Last month it had dwindled to forty-two thousand. What is in his safe-deposit box I don't feel at liberty to tell you."

"I've brought the key," Sands said. "It was found on him."

"The property is his sister's now."

"I'm sorry," Sands said, "but I'd like to look at his deposit box."

HE DID, but it was a disappointment. There were some shares of stock and a letter to Jane. It lay in his pocket as he flew back to Toronto, a mute reminder of the time and effort a policeman wastes on blind alleys. Because the letter destroyed the slim possibility that anyone had killed Stevens to inherit his money.

The letter was dated August the first, before Stevens had begun his final withdrawals. It contained one sentence to the effect that the enclosed shares would be sufficient to support Jane, if she was careful, and if Duncan died possessed of nothing else.

It didn't make sense, Sands thought bitterly. Nothing made sense.

When he left the bank he called at Duncan Stevens' office. He was surprised to find that it consisted of only two rooms, one of them containing a large and beautiful blonde with an exquisitely blank expression.

The blonde's name was Miss Evans. She was Mr. Stevens' private secretary, she informed him loftily. She didn't know when Mr. Stevens would be back. He had gone to Toronto to attend a wedding.

Sands looked around and gathered that

Stevens' business was not very pressing. There was no sign of the feverish activity associated with brokers' offices. A ticker tape machine was languidly coughing in one corner of the room. Miss Evans ignored it. She also ignored Sands until he told her that Mr. Stevens was never coming back.

There was an easy flow of mascara and rouge down Miss Evans' classic cheeks. It developed that she had just bought a fox cape on the installment plan and now she was out of a job and couldn't pay for it. What was a poor girl to do?

Sands told her to take it back.

She was new to the job, she told him. She had come only two weeks ago and didn't know who had been there before her. She just took letters. No, she simply couldn't remember what letters and Mr. Stevens said carbon copies weren't necessary.

No, she hadn't ever worked in a broker's office before. She thought it was funny. There didn't seem to be much doing.

Her salary? Forty a week in advance. She had been suspicious of that at first, but Mr. Stevens hadn't made any passes at her at all. Sands left Miss Evans pondering her twin sorrows, no fox cape and no passes.

The plane hit another air pocket and Sands clutched his stomach and stopped thinking for the rest of the trip. He was conscious of being conscious and of finding it unpleasant.

AT THE Shane residence the family and guests were starting to retire for the night although it was only half-past ten. Aspasia's bones had worn themselves out sending her premonitions of evil and were now frankly aching. She retired to her room with a hot-water bottle and a nembutal capsule prescribed by Prye. Mrs. Shane followed her sister upstairs.

The others were still sitting around the drawing room. Dinah was telling Jane, in a voice which reached Revel very clearly, that she was a damned fool if she ever got married.

Jane yawned, apologized, and promptly yawned again.

"Of course if you're bored, Jane," Dinah said coldly.

"Oh no, I'm not bored," Jane said with some truth.

"I am," Revel said dryly. "I find bad taste boring."

Nora and Prye looked up from their game of double Canfield and started talking simultaneously to preserve peace.

"Why don't we—?"

"Couldn't you—?"

They stopped.

Dinah was scowling at them. "Back to your game, turtledoves. Revel and I are going to bat some home truths around the room."

Revel shrugged. "Anything to oblige. Let's get rid of the women and children first." He glanced significantly at Jane.

"Oh, I'm not a bit sleepy," she said brightly. "Really I'm not."

Dinah switched her scowl to Jane. "Darling, if your ears get any bigger you'll take off. Beat it."

"You'd better," Nora said. "I'll go with you."

Jane repeated obstinately that she wasn't a bit sleepy, but Nora led her out of the room.

Prye remained at the card table, shuffling cards absently and watching Dinah out of the corner of his eye. She was standing in front of the fireplace, her hands clenched at her sides.

Revel sat down, sighing audibly. Neither of them spoke for some time. Then Revel said, "I don't want to quarrel with you, Dinah."

His voice was very gentle. Dinah's hands unclenched and she looked as if she wanted to cry. She clutched the mantel to steady herself.

"Your voice," she said. "When I'm ninety I'll remember your voice and the way you've deliberately used it to soften me, to make a fool of me—"

"No," Revel said.

"—and it was easy enough, wasn't it? Me! You could even fool me. You are a rat, Revel."

"I am an ordinary man," Revel said, "who had a wife who didn't love him."

"How could I possibly hate you so much if I hadn't loved you? I've got so much hate for you I'm almost happy."

"You cried every night on our honeymoon, remember? I left you alone; I

thought you'd get over it. Instead you got worse—"

"You made me hate all men, George."

"You always did," Revel said.

"The best of them is still a louse to me because you're a louse. Dennis was no better than the rest of you. I knew what he was but I was going to marry him anyway. I was going to get back at all men by marrying him."

Revel said, "Stop talking. You're only feeding your hate. I'm sorry for you, Dinah."

Her whole body was shaking. "Don't be sorry for me. All I want now is revenge, and I'm going to have it. I've got enough strength in me to fight you all."

Revel said nothing. There was nothing to say. He watched her in silence as she walked out of the room.

SAMMY TWIST had started out early. He took a streetcar along Bloor West and got off at River Road.

He felt better walking up the street. The wind was fresh and free and whipped his coat and sent the blood coursing through his body. He walked with the wind, feeling full of courage and very adventurous.

At a quarter to eleven he stood on the street outside 197 and looked up at the house. He was early. He wasn't to knock at the back door until eleven o'clock.

The first floor was dark, but lights were showing in two rooms on the second floor and one on the third.

"Knock on the back door at eleven o'clock," the wind whistled.

Sammy stepped into the driveway and walked toward the back of the house. As he watched the lights went off on the second floor. He stood beside the garage and lit a cigarette, shielding the match with his hands.

"Ask for Mr. Williams," the leaves whispered.

He began to wonder about Mr. Williams. Did he live here? And what did he want?

"I want to give you some more money. You did fine."

I did fine, Sammy thought; he said I did fine.

Sammy's hands were beginning to get cold. He threw away his cigarette and rubbed his hands together. He was a little afraid now, because he realized for

the first time that if Mr. Williams had just wanted to give him some more money he could have sent it by mail or messenger.

"Have you still got my letter? Bring it along with you."

Sammy started to walk away, slowly, a little ashamed of this sudden fear. Why, it wasn't even really dark on account of the street lights.

"I'll be waiting for you!"

But still his heart kept pounding in his ears, deafening him, and the fear had crept down into his legs and made them cold and heavy. . . .

At one o'clock his landlady got up out of bed and turned off the hall night. She knew Mr. Twist wasn't in yet and she was quite sad when she climbed back in bed. Mr. Twist was so young to get mixed up with a woman. Horses were bad enough.

XII

GEORGE REVEL had gone up to his room shortly after Dinah retired, but at one o'clock he rapped on Prye's door.

Prye groaned, yawned, and turned on the light. When he opened the door he said bitterly, "Don't I see enough of you in the daytime? Do you have to stalk me at night? Come in."

Revel came in and sat down on the edge of the bed. His face looked very pale in contrast with his bright red-plaid pajamas and bathrobe. When he lit a cigarette Prye saw that his hands were shaking.

He can't sleep, Prye thought, and he's cracking. Our smooth friend Revel is cracking.

"You're not a policeman," Revel said in his even, emotionless voice. "How much can I tell you without telling Sands?"

"That depends," Prye said, "on the tale. If you're going to confess to two murders, don't."

"I'm not going to confess to anything," Revel said dryly.

"Then go away and let me sleep. Why in hell people pick me as an audience for their life stories—"

"But I might give you a chance to add two and two on the condition that when you get four you do not tell Sands that I helped you. Let him think you're an intuitive genius. Leave me out of it."

"I see," Prye said. "You want to help the investigation along. Anonymously, of course. And the motive behind this good deed?"

"I want Dinah to get out of this house and go some place where she'll be happy."

Prye looked at him. "Very noble, but useless, I assure you. Dinah will never be happy. Why didn't you have some children, Revel?"

"Dinah didn't want them."

Prye nodded. "Naturally she didn't. I've known very few women who didn't throw a fit when they learned they were pregnant, especially the first time. After all, it's a big job. You can't expect a woman to assume it without some misgivings."

"It's too late now," Revel said. "There's barely enough time to save our skins."

"Your skin?"

"My skin especially," Revel said with a thin smile. "As it stands now I'm safe enough. Sands has nothing against me but a vast suspicion."

"And a letter."

"A letter, but not necessarily to me. There are thousands of Georges in the world. But suppose the letter was to me and suppose I told you what it meant, could you convince Sands you figured it out for yourself?"

"I can convince most of the people most of the time," Prye said modestly. "Besides, whatever you tell me in this room will not be witnessed. If you wanted to deny everything afterward, it would be my word against yours."

Revel stubbed his cigarette carefully.

"Yes," he said. "Duncan did a lot of traveling. Have you found that out?"

"No."

"He did. Keep that in mind. I want you to realize this too: neither Duncan nor I stood to gain much by this deal, almost nothing, in fact. But a third person, *any third person*, stood to gain a hell of a lot. Remember that, too."

"Why were you in it?"

Revel shrugged. "Excitement, perhaps. Motives mean nothing. I'm a realist, and only romantics take motives into consideration."

"You're confusing enough without dragging in romanticism," Prye said wearily. "What was the deal?"

"I said I wouldn't tell you outright."

"All right. Was it the first?"

"The second. I've given you your clue, that neither Duncan nor I had much to gain. It was Duncan's idea in the first place. He was a little batty, I think, and very bored."

Prye said, "Dry up. I'm thinking."

After five minutes he raised his head and glanced at Revel. "You'd go to prison if it were found out?"

"Undoubtedly," Revel said. "If you'd like to think it over I'll go back to bed."

"Hell, yes," Prye said. "You can't sleep so you come in here and unload your problems on me so I can't sleep."

Revel smiled. "It's all quite simple," he said, and walked out and closed the door behind him.

PRYE SAT in a chair until two o'clock, smoking. When he woke up he was still in the chair and the sun was streaming in on his face. He sat up and discovered that he had a stiff neck and a sore throat. Cursing Revel roundly, he went down the hall to the bathroom.

While he was shaving he began to whistle "Yankee Doodle." He laid down his razor, interested. Why "Yankee Doodle"? he wondered.

Prye believed that the songs people whistled or sang were not chosen haphazardly. There was always a reason, a chain of circumstances behind the choice. Sometimes the reason was a simple one: whenever he and Nora quarreled Prye found himself whistling "Stormy Weather" with monotonous regularity.

But why "Yankee Doodle"? The tune kept running through his head long after he had forced himself to stop whistling it.

When he went into the dining room he found that he was the last to arrive. He greeted the others and took his place beside Nora, who was having her coffee.

"Hello," she said. "You've been thinking again. You're all wan and haggard."

"I shaved," Prye said. "Jackson, two boiled eggs, four minutes."

Mrs. Shane said, "I'm glad you've come, Paul. We still haven't decided what to do about the wedding presents. I've phoned everyone, of course, but it is a problem. Now if we could set another definite date—"

"We've gone into that," Nora said.

"Not thoroughly," Mrs. Shane protested. "Suppose the case is never solved?"

Dinah glanced at Prye and said smoothly, "That possibility doesn't worry Paul. Does it, Paul? I shouldn't be surprised if Paul has already solved it and is simply keeping us in suspense like the enigmatic detectives of fiction."

"Don't be silly, Dinah," Nora said sharply.

The others were silent. Dinah was gazing into her coffee cup as if she were trying to see into the future. Revel was sitting across from her, not looking at her but knowing how she looked and what she wore.

Jackson came in again very quietly. Dinah's head jerked up.

"I wish you wouldn't creep, Jackson!"

"Sorry, Mrs. Revel," Jackson said politely. "Inspector Sands is here and wants to see you."

"Me?" Dinah said.

"Yes, madam."

Dinah rose and waved an apology to Mrs. Shane. "Here I go."

She went out into the hall. Sands was standing by the front door holding his hat in his hands. He still wore his topcoat and he looked pale and rather uncertain, Dinah thought.

"Hello," she said cheerfully. "Won't you come in?"

He didn't move, but stood regarding her soberly.

"What were you doing in Stevens' room on Sunday night?" he said. "I saw you."

"You didn't actually see me, Inspector." She stood facing him, smiling. "The curtains were drawn."

"The door was locked," Sands said. "I locked it."

"I unlocked it," she said dryly. "Not hard. I was looking for something."

"Find it?"

"No."

"Know what it was?"

"No. But it would be a parcel, wouldn't it? And I knew Duncan. He was too suspicious and sly to hide anything where he couldn't watch it. Therefore I searched his room."

"I was in Boston yesterday," Sands said.

"The home of the bean and the cod," Dinah said. "So what?"

"Stevens was a crook."

"Of course," Dinah said. "He hadn't enough space between his eyes. Therefore, he was a crook."

"Why?"

"For the hell of it. He had enough money."

"Had he?" Sands paused. "He leaves his sister barely enough to keep her."

"Keep her in mink, you mean."

"I mean, keep her in food," Sands said, frowning. "He had a dollar in his bank account."

"You're crazy." She was staring at him in disbelief. "Or you've been taken for a ride. I'm charitable. I vote for the ride. What's your bet?"

"Neither. He had no money. He spent forty-two thousand dollars in the past month. I want to know what he spent it on."

Dinah smiled. "On himself. Or buying off one of the hepatica's men. Anything at all."

"You can't help me?"

"No, sorry. You might try asking Revel."

"I HAVE. That's all I want to ask you now, Mrs. Revel. If you're going back to the dining room you might tell Sammy Twist I want to see him."

She looked at him for a moment and said, "You *are* crazy. Who's Sammy Twist?"

Sands said, "A young man who's disappeared."

"Disappeared? Well?"

"His landlady reported this morning that he went out around ten last night and he never came back."

"He never came back," Dinah repeated slowly. "I think I'm rather envious of your Sammy Twist."

"His landlady said he had a telephone call about seven o'clock. He told her he was going out and he asked her to remember an address for him. She wrote it down."

"This address?" Dinah said. "Yes, it would be this address, of course, or you wouldn't be here. The port of missing men."

"I think he's dead."

"Of course," Dinah said. "Of course he's dead."

She kept nodding her head, her eyes half closed and glassy. "Duncan and Dennis. Why not Sammy?"

"You'd better go up to your room, Mrs. Revel."

"Why?" she asked. "Why should I go up to my room? I want to follow you. I want to see that you don't find Sammy. Maybe Sammy never went back because he didn't want to go back, see? Maybe Sammy was like me, not giving a damn, only wanting to be left in peace. Maybe he doesn't want to be found—"

"You're hysterical, Mrs. Revel. Please—"

"Nuts! There are things so much worse than death. You say I'm hysterical because you don't want to admit it. I know about you, Sands. You haven't the faintest respect for human life. I can see it in your eyes, contempt for weakness. Why are you a policeman, Sands? For a laugh? Guilty conscience, maybe?" She drew a long, deep breath that ended in a sob. "Sammy's all right, and Duncan, and Dennis—"

"Guilty conscience, I think," Sands said quietly. "You'd better go and rest. Perhaps Dr. Prye will give you a sedative."

"To hell with Prye." She straightened up and drew back her head. "To hell with sedatives. I'm going to get roaring drunk. I'm going to get so drunk I'll think you are the Dionne quintuplets. You wait there. I'll be back."

She swung round and walked quickly and unsteadily toward the drawing room. Sands made a feeble noise of protest. He was a little uncomfortable with Dinah Revel even when she was cold sober.

He went into the library, laid his hat on the desk, and began to reread the notes he had taken in Boston. He was still there when Prye came in.

"You don't get handwriting samples by playing charades," Prye said. "Let's get that straight."

Sands looked up in surprise. "Don't you? Sit down."

Prye tossed an envelope on the desk. "But there they are." He walked over to the windows. A police car was just stopping on the driveway. Six men climbed out of it, armed with a strange assortment of implements—spades, pickaxes, a camera, and an iron-toothed rake.

Prye raised his eyebrows. "Friends of yours?"

Sands said, "We're looking for something that may be underground."

"The fifty brunettes?"

"No, a young man, one young man."

Prye froze.

"The young man came here last night," Sands said. "I think he is still here."

"Who was he?"

Sands told him.

"I see," Prye said. "You think he came here and never got away. Why?"

"HE KNEW something, too much perhaps. He was an elevator boy at the Royal York. I examined his locker about an hour ago and found his betting book. On Saturday afternoon he played fifty dollars on Iron Man. That's an unusual bet for an elevator boy accustomed to two-dollar bets. On Saturday morning Miss Stevens was poisoned, on Saturday afternoon an elevator boy conjured up fifty dollars, and on Saturday night Duncan Stevens was killed. Problem: who gave Sammy the fifty dollars, and why?"

"For services rendered," Prye said.

"Exactly. And what particular service do you think of? Remember that Sammy was young, that he was not a crook, that he liked to play the horses."

"He could dial a number," Prye said.

Sands said, "Yes. I think he did dial a number. He called the hospital on Saturday at noon."

He paused, running his finger over his upper lip, smoothing it out like crepe paper.

"So the people I'm interested in right now are the people who have alibis for that phone call. We have assumed that the person who made the call was the person who poisoned Jane by mistake and later killed Duncan, and that whoever had an alibi for the phone call was not the murderer. Now we'll have to turn that around. If the murderer paid Sammy fifty dollars to make that call, he or she will certainly have an alibi for that time."

He flicked over the pages of his notebook.

"Here they are. Dr. Prye, when that phone call was made you were talking to Sergeant Bannister in the hall outside this room. That gives you and Miss Stevens, who was in the hospital, the strongest alibis

for that time. Mrs. Revel was in the tap-room of the King Edward Hotel tossing pretzels into the air and trying to catch them in her mouth. Two waiters remember her very well. Mrs. Shane had just arrived home from the church with Dennis Williams and they were together in the drawing room. Mrs. Hogan and Hilda were in the kitchen. Jackson was talking to me in the library. That leaves Miss Shane and Miss O'Shaughnessy with no alibis for the time of the phone call, as well as Duncan Stevens, who no longer counts."

He drew a breath and went on in a different one: "But perhaps Sammy isn't dead at all. If he is, we'll find him."

Prye nodded. "Meanwhile, do we tell Mrs. Shane what the squad is looking for and why?"

"I'll tell them," Sands said.

It wasn't the kind of news any of them could be expected to like.

Except for Aspasia, who fainted, they took it calmly enough. They sat around the drawing room sipping the hot, strong tea which Mrs. Hogan believed to be an antidote for emotional upsets. Dinah went on slowly and methodically getting drunk. Revel sat apart from the others, watching them with an air of detached interest like a turtle peering out from his impregnable shell.

By twelve o'clock Dinah was drunk enough to be getting quarrelsome. Hoping to avoid another scene, Prye offered to take her for a drive to sober her up.

"Sober me up?" Dinah said. "What in hell do you get drunk for if you're going to sober up Prye, you're a louse."

Prye agreed.

"All men are lice," Dinah said. "Especially Revel. Revel is the great king louse almighty."

"I'd awfully like a drive," Jane said faintly. "I'm not at all well."

"I'll be delighted," Prye said. "Anyone else want to come?"

Nora said "Yes." Dinah said if Nora and Jane went she would have to come along to protect them from the lice which all men were.

NORA WENT upstairs and brought down her coat and Dinah's, and Prye went out to get his car from the garage.

He ran into two men who were probing with spades in the earth beside the garage. They stopped work to glance at him curiously.

"Finding things?" Prye asked pleasantly.

They both said "Yeah," and went on with their work. Halfway up the driveway a small man was scooping bits of earth into a bottle. A man with a camera was standing beside him.

Prye went up to them. "Could I get my car past here?" he said.

"In a hurry?" the small man said dryly.

"Look again and you'll see that I'm busy."

"That's no answer," Prye said. "Can I get my car through here? Or not?"

"Not."

"When will—"

"Go away!"

The man with the camera grinned and said, "Joe is temperamental. He doesn't like people. His mother used to take him on shopping tours."

"I don't like *big* people," Joe corrected him. "I got the damndest inferiority complex you ever saw. Watch this, gentlemen."

He removed a bottle from his pocket, poured some of the liquid into the bottle of earth, and held it up to Prye. The earth had turned a deep blue.

"I'd be staggered," Prye said, "if I didn't know that was the benzedrine-hydrogen peroxide test for bloodstains."

"Oh, go away," Joe said gloomily. "Get your bloody car through. I should care."

Prye went back to the garage. The three women were standing in the driveway waiting for him. Dinah was swaying somewhat but she looked sober enough.

"I'll ride in the rumble seat with Dinah," Nora suggested. "The more air the better."

"What's all this about air?" Dinah said. "What are these men doing?"

One of the men looked up and said he was planting petunias.

"I hate petunias," Dinah said. "Reminds me of a guy I knew once. He was a petunia."

"Can't you get your mind off men?" Jane cried irritably. "Come on."

Prye backed the car out of the garage. Dinah poised on the back fender and tugged at the handle of the rumble seat.

"Let me," Prye said, getting out of the car. "I think it's locked."

"Locked hell," Dinah said. "Easy as rolling off a log—"

The seat opened up and Dinah said "Locked hell," again in a strange voice. The next instant she had fallen headfirst into the rumble seat.

"I'm sick of drunks," Prye said. "Dinah! Come out of there!" He went over and grabbed her leg. "Dinah!"

Dinah didn't move. Prye climbed up and looked into the rumble seat. He remained in that position.

Sammy Twist was in there. His eyes were wide open, as if he were surprised that a strange woman had fallen on top of him. The blood had dried on his hair and his forehead.

"I do wish—" Jane began.

"Go away," Prye said curtly. "Nora, go too."

Nora put out her hand and grasped Jane's arm. "Paul. It's not—it couldn't possibly be—"

Prye said grimly, "It is."

"Is what," Jane said. "I thought we were going for a drive."

The two men beside the garage had put down their spades and come up to the car.

One of them looked in and said, "Holy cats."

He moved aside politely and let the other one look in too.

"Help me get this woman out of here," Prye yelled. "She's fainted."

"Don't disturb the body," one of the men said.

Jane let out a feeble bleat and started running to the house, holding her hands to her ears. Nora sat down quietly on the driveway and closed her eyes.

Prye had grasped the front of Dinah's coat and was pulling her out of the seat.

Sammy didn't blink an eye.

He was quiet and cold and brittle. His bloody head rested against the blue leather seat and his knees were bent up against his chest like a baby's in the womb.

The two policemen carried Dinah into the house. Prye went back to Sammy and stood looking down at him with angry eyes.

"Like a baby," he said. "Like a damn little baby. Like a damn bloody baby you are, Sammy."

Sammy's eyes, wide, innocent, knowing, surprised, looked back at him.

EVEN BEFORE she opened her eyes Dinah started to cry. She cried quietly, without moving. From his chair Prye could see the tears streaming from her closed eyelids. He was still angry about Sammy. He watched Dinah, detached, critical, without sympathy.

He said finally, "What are you crying about? Are you sorry for Sammy or sorry for yourself? In either case there's nothing I can do. Do you mind if I go now?"

She opened her eyes and blew her nose. Prye went over and sat down beside the bed. "While you're crying, you might toss in a gallon or so for Revel too. He's still in love with you. He's practically pushed himself into the penitentiary to prove it."

She blew her nose again and said, "How?"

"He told me what Duncan brought to this house, what he was killed for. He wants to get the mystery cleared up so that you can go away from this house and be happy. I told him it was a lost cause, that you'd never be happy."

"You think that's true?"

"Certainly."

"Why can't I be? Why won't I be?"

"Because you don't know what happiness is. You think it's living on an exalted plane all the time, a constant ecstasy. You want to swoon with bliss twenty-four hours a day."

"I don't!" she cried shrilly.

"You want to sink up to your eyes in an oozy mixture of sweetness and light, a sluggish syrup that will paralyze you. You're a nihilist. You believe in nothing really, because you believe that happiness is unconsciousness, unawareness of unhappiness. You're in love with death. There are thousands of neurotics like you, many of them alcoholics, drinking themselves into a stupor, groping always toward extinction, the bliss of unconsciousness."

"But why? If I am like this there is a reason. I want to know."

"I am hampered by my lack of knowledge of you and your family. But I would guess that you experienced a great deal of illness, perhaps a death, when you were a child."

"Yes."

"Freud would trace it back to some un-

pleasant sex experience which has been repressed. I don't always agree with Freud but I think such a repression, added to your painful memories of illness and death, has made you what you are. I think you're a passionate woman who has never known fulfillment."

She was very white. She said, "No, no, I haven't."

"I believe your marriage was a constant struggle not between you and Revel as you thought, but between you and you, between the instinctive sex-hungry Dinah and the Dinah who hates her own body and takes off her clothes in the dark. To you the natural functions of the body are depraved. But that's a stiff dose for your mind to take, so your mind didn't take it. It indulged in some dexterous hocus-pocus, with the result that the depravity applies to everything male. Your hate for your own body has been directed into a hate for all men. Me, even."

"You," she said grimly. "I'd hate you anyway for knowing so much about me."

"That's often the case," he said in a mild voice. "Neurotics seldom want to be understood. Hospitals are full of them—little whining cats that rub up against you for sympathy, showing their wounds but not letting you touch them. They've got to keep their wounds open, you see; they're what make them different from other people. Their wounds are their excuse in the eyes of the world, their justification."

She sat up straight in the bed. "I'm not like that! I'm not asking for sympathy."

"I'm just telling you what I think. You don't have to believe me. I'll also tell you what I'd do if I were you."

"All right." Her voice was tired.

"IT WON'T be easy. In your case I don't recommend psychoanalysis. It has cured some neurotics, but in others it has intensified their egocentricity and magnified their ills. I'd advise you to try switching the emphasis of your life and quit moping over the inadequacy of your sex life."

"I don't—"

"Then I'd take some of my money, if I were you, and spend it. Very few people are civilized enough to enjoy a lot of money by spending it on themselves. You might try some social-service work. Go to a

baby clinic and change a few diapers. There's something very earthly about changing diapers. After that you might try having a few babies of your own, say three or four, for instance."

"Four!" She looked horrified. "Whose babies?"

"George will do," Prye said easily. "Providing he's not in jail. And if I know George he won't be. Yes, a few babies by all means. Instead of worrying about yourself you'll be worrying about Junior refusing his spinach and whether little Mary's hair will be curly."

"But—heredity?"

"George isn't a born crook," Prye said. "Besides, that type of heredity is important only when it's aided by environment."

"What did George do exactly?"

Prye looked down at her thoughtfully. "Really want to know? George didn't tell me. He merely gave me the clues. My subconscious did the rest by making me whistle 'Yankee Doodle.'"

"Oh, don't be mysterious," she said impatiently.

He got up and went to the door. "Dennis and Duncan were killed because they had fifty thousand dollars and somebody else wanted it."

"Money?" Dinah said. "*Just money?*"

"Money is enough," Prye said.

He closed the door behind him, stood for a minutes in the hall, and went downstairs. Sands was just coming in the front door. He looked calm, almost indifferent, though his face was a shade grayer.

"I've figured something out for you," Prye said.

Sands leaned against the wall, as if he were too tired to stand alone. "Have you?"

"Yes. I know what a brunette is."

Sands said, faintly ironic, "*You know?*"

"It's a thousand dollars. I'm pretty sure of it."

"Oh." Sands shot him a quick glance. "Revel break down and confess?"

"I did some thinking," Prye said smoothly. "How much did Stevens withdraw from his account this past month?"

"Forty-two thousand dollars."

"In American money. And how much would that be worth in Canadian money?"

"At the present exchange rate, 10 per cent, about forty-six thousand dollars."

"That's the official exchange rate," Prye

said. "But if you know where to go, and as a broker Duncan would know, you can buy a Canadian dollar in the United States for eighty American cents. So with his forty-two thousand dollars Duncan could buy more than fifty thousand dollars in Canadian money. If that could be smuggled across the border into Canada, as in fact it was, it could be used to buy forty-six thousand American dollars, at the regular exchange rate. That would make a clear profit of four thousand dollars.

"Stevens would get half for his part, buying up Canadian money cheaply in the United States and bringing it across the border. Revel would get the other half for buying up American securities in Canada and then turning them over to Stevens."

"A conspiracy to evade the regulations of the Foreign Exchange Control Board," Sands said. "It's been done before. I didn't think of it in connection with this case. The profit seems so disproportionately small compared to the risk. Two thousand dollars for each of them."

Prye said dryly, "But fifty thousand dollars for someone else."

"Or for Revel," Sands said. "If the deal went through he would have received two thousand. But if he didn't have to return American securities to Stevens, his profit is fifty thousand, the same as a hijacker's would be."

"Revel doesn't need the money."

SANDS SMILED cynically. "Everybody needs fifty thousand dollars, even as you and I. How is the money done up?"

"I'm not that psychic," Prye said. "I suppose it's wrapped and that the parcel is fairly bulky and that it's hidden somewhere in the house."

"My men were over the house thoroughly yesterday. Nothing was found."

"Stevens was pretty subtle."

"Perhaps he was subtle but he was no Houdini. If the money were here it would have been found."

"Williams found it, I think. Did he put it back? He must have. He—"

"How do you know Williams found it?"

"He's dead, isn't he?" Prye said.

"Get Revel for me," Sands said. "There are two possible reasons for Williams' death: either he found the money or he knew who murdered Stevens."

Prye went out and came back to the library in five minutes with Revel. Sands asked Revel politely to sit down, and Revel, puzzled but still indifferent, sat down in the leather chair beside the desk.

"I am not," Sands said, "asking you to say anything which may be used in evidence. I think personally that you're involved in some crooked deal which would annoy the Foreign Exchange Control Board, but I can't prove it and you know I can't. We'll leave that then. I want you to tell me if, when you talked to Williams at the hotel shortly before he was murdered, he hinted that he knew who murdered Stevens."

Revel smiled. "Did he act as though he had guilty knowledge? No. I think he was bewildered and a little scared."

"Why?"

"Scared you might arrest him, I fancy. I've had the same feeling myself now and then."

"Why did he come back to this house when I'd given him permission to return to Montreal?"

"Why?" Revel said. "Why do people do anything? For love or money. Perhaps both."

"Did you send him back here?"

Revel's smile broadened into a grin. "What a nasty question, Inspector. If I admit sending him back, it would mean that I admit knowledge of those elusive fifty brunettes, wouldn't it? It would also mean that since I wanted to find out where they were I couldn't be the murderer. So you are tempting me to clear myself of a murder charge by getting myself embroiled in a lesser charge."

"Nothing of the sort," Sands said brusquely. "You don't think Williams had knowledge of the murderer?"

"Quite sure of it. I believe he even suspected *me*."

"Horrible thought," the inspector said. "All right. You may go."

Revel looked surprised but willing to go. When he had left Prye said, "And what about Sammy?"

"Nothing much beyond the essential fact that he is dead. Struck from behind with something heavy and sharp. Sutton suggests an ax, but the weapon hasn't been found. Apparently Sammy was struck down on the driveway some time before

midnight. You must have forgotten to lock your rumble seat. The garage is never locked, I'm told." He smiled sourly. "Precautions like that are considered unnecessary in this section of the city. Someone rang up Sammy, told him to come here at a certain time, waited for him to come, and killed him."

"And where in hell was the policeman we've been billeting?"

"That's the interesting part of it," Sands said softly. "He was in the hall downstairs with a clear view of both halls. The lights were on and he swears he was awake."

"And that means?"

"Fairies," Sands said. "The fairies killed Sammy, because nobody went through those halls after eleven o'clock last night except Revel, who went into your room around one and went straight back to his own room half an hour later."

"Windows?"

"The first-floor windows are out. The policeman says that everyone was upstairs from a quarter to eleven."

"Second-floor windows then," Prye said. "I'd rather believe in an agile murderer than in fairies. There is ivy growing on the walls, trees surrounding the house, and there's the old boarding-school dodge of knotted sheets."

Sands said, "The ivy's too young to support a cat. The trees are too far away. And the sheet— Perhaps I'd better see Hilda." He rang the bell for Jackson.

WHEN Jackson came in he was looking shocked and a little frightened and his voice trembled. "Where is Hilda?" Sands asked.

"Upstairs," Jackson said. "I—She is making up the rooms."

"Will you get her, please?"

Jackson hesitated. "I don't think she'll come."

"She'll come."

Jackson's face got red. "She's scared. You're a policeman. You're used to seeing people murdered. What does it matter to you? If people weren't murdered you wouldn't have a job—"

He had to stop because he couldn't control his voice. He was afraid he might cry, so he turned and went out, very stiffly.

Sands watched him go, his eyes rather

sad. "He's a very young man," he said gently.

Prye said, "Find anything out about him?"

"Just that he went to Harvard as he says he did. He waited on table in one of the residences."

Prye said, "So that's it," and Sands nodded. They were both a little embarrassed at their own softness.

When Hilda came in her eyes were red with weeping. She refused to sit down but stood just inside the door, defiant and sullen.

"I don't know anything," she said.

"You look after the upstairs, Hilda?"

"That's part of my job. I make the beds, change the linen twice a week, and tidy—"

"When do you change the linen, Hilda?"

Her gaze said plainly, I might have expected stupid questions like this. She said finally, "Mondays and Thursdays. You're wasting my time. There's been three murders done and you—"

"Yesterday morning, then, you changed the linen on all the beds?"

"Most of them."

"What do you do with the soiled linen?"

"Put it down the laundry chute. It goes into a basket in the cellar."

"Have you made the beds this morning?"

The scorn of the righteous was in her voice. "Naturally I have. It's nearly lunch time. I'm just tidying up the bathrooms."

"Notice anything unusual about any of the beds this morning?" Sands asked.

She looked faintly contemptuous. "Sure I did. I found Mrs. Revel in bed crying, and I found a hole in one of the blankets where Mr. Revel had burned it with a cigarette, if that's what you mean by unusual."

Sands regarded her coldly. "I'd like to go down to the cellar and see the laundry basket. I want you to come too."

"Why?" she cried. "Why? I don't want to go down there where—where Mr. Williams was— I want to go home!"

"You want your mother," Sands said.

She began to cry. "I w-want my m-mother!"

Sands said, "You come down into the cellar with me and I'll send you home to your mother."

He took her by the arm and led her out. Prye followed them to the cellar. The laundry basket was beside the steps. Sands paused in front of it and said, "I want you to count the sheets, Hilda, and as you count, hand them to me."

She started to pull out the sheets, still crying, but softly and happily.

"Sixteen," Sands said, five minutes later. "Is that all?"

Hilda straightened up. "N-no, I don't think so. Let me see. I didn't change Revel's bed, as he hasn't been here very long, and I didn't go into Mr. Stevens' or Mr. Williams' room. But all the other beds would make eighteen sheets. That means there are two missing."

"So it does," Sands said.

"What could that mean? Who'd want two dirty sheets?"

Sands told her she'd better go up to her room and pack if she still wanted to go home. She exhibited her first sign of willing co-operation by running up the steps two at a time. Sands and Prye faced each other across the laundry basket.

"The old boarding-school dodge," Sands said, "seems to have worked. How it was worked is another question. If any of the guests came through the first- and second-floor halls carrying two soiled sheets Constable Clovis would remember. Sitting at the front door, he had a view of both halls. However, we'll examine the rooms on the second floor."

THEY were lucky. The second room looked at was the bathroom beside Duncan's room. There were unmistakable signs that someone had crawled through the window: the soot on the outside ledge was disturbed and several strands of lint were caught in the roughened wood.

"Nerve," Sands said. "Or desperation. Or both. Where could the sheets have been tied to?"

Prye pointed. "The toilet. That would give the whole thing a nice homey touch."

"Ridiculous, isn't it? A grim and desperate murderer tying a sheet round a toilet, all done in perfect seriousness." He looked out of the window again. "The tree there would prevent anyone from accidentally seeing the operation. The bathroom door would be locked—perfectly legitimate. And the sheets? Brought in

under a bathrobe, I suppose, taken out the same way, thrown down the laundry chute, recovered later, and put in the furnace. Neat. Nothing incriminating. Baths are being taken all the time. Question is, did the policeman notice who went into this bathroom?"

The policeman, roused out of bed by the telephone, did not know. Everyone, he said, was going into bathrooms at that time. They were all retiring. Naturally he paid no attention.

"Naturally," Sands repeated to Prye with a grimace. "Probably closed his eyes to avoid embarrassing the ladies."

He left Prye standing in the hall and went outside by the back door. Two men were putting Sammy Twist on a stretcher and covering him. When the cover was over him Sammy didn't look human at all. He was still curled up like a baby.

Sands said, "Wait!" and went over and lifted the cover from Sammy's face.

"Can't you—straighten him out a little?" he asked the men who were carrying the stretcher.

The men looked at him in surprise. One of them opened his mouth to speak but Sands said coldly, "What I mean is, he looks a bit—messy. Oh well. Never mind. Go ahead."

He walked off, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, I'll be damned," one of the men said. "Looks messy, does he? It ain't enough that the poor guy is murdered, he's got to look cute. That Sands has no heart."

"He ain't human," the other man agreed.

They had a profound discussion on Sands' inhumanity all the way to the morgue.

Sands walked back to the house, thinking, I'll have to be more careful. I'm getting soft. When he went into the hall he saw Dinah coming down the steps toward him. She was moving slowly and carefully, like a woman who has been ill for a long time. Sands noticed for the first time how thin she was, with the thinness and awkwardness of a schoolgirl.

He said, "I'm sorry you had such an unpleasant experience, Mrs. Revel."

Her eyes looked at him blankly for a moment. "Yes, it was unpleasant. I don't want to think about it." She shivered. "He was cold—cold. Was that your Sammy Twist?"

Sands nodded.

"He was awfully young," Dinah said, stroking the banister with her hand. Little whining cats, she thought, that rub against your leg for sympathy. "I was never young. When I was born I looked like a little old man, I'm told, all wrinkled and gray."

"Most babies are red," Sands said.

"Yes, I know. I was gray. A little old man." She came down the rest of the steps, stroking the banister as she moved, her face strange and dreamy like a cat's. "Of course I should never have been born at all."

"No," Sands said, fascinated by the movement of her hand, soft and quick on the banister.

"My mother was shocked when she saw me. She thought she was going to have a baby and then she saw me, a little gray old man. Obscene, isn't it?"

He wanted to escape from her. He wanted to tell her to keep her chin up or go to hell, he didn't care which.

Jackson came out of the kitchen, ringing the bell for lunch. Dinah walked away, without speaking, toward the dining room.

"Will you be having lunch, sir?" Jackson asked.

"No, thanks," Sands said.

He shut himself up in the library before anyone else appeared.

DINAH stood by the buffet looking at herself in the mirror. I look crazy, she thought, like a crazy, white-faced witch. Nobody would be in love with me, certainly not George. Witch—

She knew it was George coming in by the sound of his step, but she didn't turn around.

"Hello, Dinah," Revel said. "I've been talking to Prye."

"He has no right to talk about me to anyone," she said without turning around.

"He wasn't talking about you but about me. He thinks I'm a heel. I'm inclined to agree. I must be getting senile."

"You'll be thirty-three in two weeks."

"Will I?" He seemed surprised. "You must remember to send me a pint of cyanide for my birthday."

"Where are you going after—after all this?"

"Home," he said. "Unless the police

choose some nice new address for me."

"Home," she repeated. "Where do you live, George?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Same place."

"Is it exactly the same?"

"I think so."

It seemed strange to her that it should be exactly the same. She said, "Except my room, of course."

He looked at her gravely. "Your room is exactly the same too. I like yellow curtains."

"So do I. Like the sun."

"Yes, like the sun," he said.

Their breathing was quick and uneven. She turned her head away.

"You'll come back," he said.

"No." She lifted her hand slowly to her head. "No, it's too late."

Prye came in with Nora and her mother, and then Jane and Aspasia clinging to each other, two gloomy wraiths. Jane's eyes were swollen and the lids were pink and transparent.

"What's the matter with Jane?" Prye asked Nora in a whisper.

"What's the matter with all of us?" Nora said. "Murders. Our emotions don't operate on the sub-zero level that yours do. Besides, she's just found out that Duncan left her almost nothing."

"Who told her?"

"Dinah?" Nora said grimly. "Who else?"

Jackson came in with the soup. When he had gone out again, Mrs. Shane said, "Do let us have a pleasant meal for once. I'm sure everything will turn out all right and that all of us will come out unscathed."

Aspasia was in the grip of the tragic muse again. "I might have saved these young men," she said sonorously. "But no, no one would listen to me. I was scorned, even as Christ and Cassandra—"

"And President Roosevelt," Dinah said.

"I might have saved them."

"How?" Mrs. Shane inquired acidly.

"By concentrating on Good," Aspasia replied.

"Nobody was stopping you."

"It requires more than one."

"Aunt Aspasia is right!" Jane cried defiantly. "If you hadn't all been so unpleasant, so offensive even— But you have been and you are and you always will be! And

now I'm going to s-s-starve to death."

"The argument is a little hard to follow," Prye said. "Are you going to starve because we're offensive or—"

Jane turned to him. "And you! You're supposed to be a detective and you haven't detected anything, not a single thing. If I were Nora I'd think twice before marrying you, *I'd think twice!*"

Prye said to Nora, "You did, didn't you, darling?"

NORA grinned and said that if all her thoughts on the subject were laid end to end they'd reach from the level of the present conversation to that of the Einstein theory.

"I don't want any lunch," Jane said stiffly.

"That's fine," Dinah said. "Good common sense. If you're going to starve anyway you might as well train for it. Eventually, why not now?"

"Oh, do sit down, Jane!" Mrs. Shane exclaimed. "Don't be so childish. Really, you'd think I was running a boarding-house the way people jump up and down and dash in and out at mealtime. Jane!"

Jane sat down and finished her meal in a cold and disapproving silence. After lunch she went up to her room and locked the door.

"Sulking," Nora told Prye in the drawing room. "Duncan used to do the same thing. She's copying him. It's not Jane's real nature to sulk. She'd prefer to weep prettily to an audience of six or more males."

"God grant I be not one," Prye said fervently. "I'm a bit weary of weeping ladies."

"I'm sorry for that. I'm due to break down any minute."

"You're different," Prye said. He kissed her thoroughly to prove how different she was.

"I don't feel much better," Nora said gloomily. "Is it true that you haven't tried to help Inspector Sands?"

"No."

"But you just can't do anything, is that it?"

He did not reply. She looked at him sharply.

"Paul, you know who did it? Tell me."

"Do you want to know?"

She turned away. "No. I don't know.

It's all such a muddle. That young boy—"

"Sammy," Prye said. "Without Sammy we couldn't have found out—"

"We?"

"Sands and I."

"Is he—going to arrest anyone?"

Prye said, "It's Sands' problem. I'm keeping out of it."

"Because of me?"

Prye took her hand. "Don't think or talk of it. We don't know what's going to happen or when. But there's nothing we can do, except go on as we have been."

"Until somebody else is murdered?"

"There won't be any more murders," he said quietly. "The only person who is in danger realizes her danger—and locks her door."

XIV

IN HER room Jane sat in front of the dressing table applying a new brand of cold cream. It was Jane's infallible cure for her injured feelings. The sight of her own face in the mirror was a tonic.

She followed the directions religiously, crying a little at the same time. After all, people had treated her dreadfully. Even Duncan. Duncan had left her to starve.

She got up and went to the clothes closet to examine her last year's mink coat. The thing was in tatters, really, but it might do for one more year. The silkiness of the fur on her arm was pleasant and she was almost cheerful when she went back to the dressing table to remove the cream.

It's too bad Dennis isn't here, she thought. I think I could have become quite fond of Dennis. But there's Jackson—

She changed into a blue wool dress, powdered her face, applied lipstick very cautiously, and went downstairs. There was no one in the hall except a large policeman, who smiled at her. Jane smiled back and went on through the dining room into the kitchen.

Jackson was sitting at the table playing solitaire. He got to his feet hurriedly when he saw her and said, "Oh. Sorry, Miss Stevens."

She laughed and said, "Sorry? Have you got anything to be sorry about?"

He shifted his feet and looked embarrassed.

"Mayn't I sit down?" she asked with an

arch smile. She sat down in the chair he'd been sitting in. The warmth of him was still there. It crept through her dress and she shivered and looked up at him.

"You've made the chair warm for me."

Jackson blushed painfully. "Yes. I—I was just playing solitaire."

"Were you lonesome?"

God, this is awful, she's trying to make me, Jackson thought. He said, "Yes, madam. Hilda has gone."

"Has she? Is that what's making you lonesome?"

"I miss her," he said.

Her eyes lost some of their warmth. "It's funny the police let her go, isn't it? I mean, she was here like the rest of us."

"The police let Mr. Williams go. And Hilda's just a kid, eighteen. She wouldn't have anything to do with the murders."

"I'm twenty-two," Jane said.

He was surprised. He was going to say she looked older but he caught himself and laughed instead. "Are you? Well, you're just a kid then too."

"I feel very old," she said. "So much death—makes you feel old."

Her eyes were sad and her mouth drooped. Jackson thought she looked adorable and so did she.

"I'm sorry," he said.

A lovely fat tear rolled down each cheek. "I'm going to be poor. Duncan didn't leave me anything. I'm all alone."

She didn't look quite so adorable now to Jackson.

"Not a thing?" he said.

"Except some stocks."

"Good stocks?"

"I don't know. Duncan was awfully clever, so I guess they must be good stocks."

"But there aren't enough of them?"

"Not nearly," she said sadly. "Not nearly enough."

Her hand lay limp and soft and helpless on the table near his own. He touched it.

"How *nice* you are!" she whispered.

"You won't starve," he said. "Everything will be all right, I'm sure. What I mean is — some man — marriage, you know—"

The bell rang in the kitchen and Jackson said, "I have to go."

"Oh, don't go."

"The bell—"

It rang again. He was stroking her hand. Gosh, he thought, she smells swell.

After the third ring Dinah strode in, eyed the tableau coldly, and said, "All tied up, Jackson?"

Jackson said nothing.

"**H**AS SHE reached the stage where she's borrowed your handkerchief?" Dinah said. "No? Good. She may have one of *mine*."

"No, thanks," Jane said with dignity. "Really, I don't understand the meaning of this intrusion."

Dinah smiled grimly. "No? Well, I'd hate to explain in front of Jackson. Come along. We need a fourth for bridge."

"I don't want to play bridge."

Dinah grasped her shoulder, not gently. "You can always sneak back to the kitchen in the dark."

Jane threw Jackson an appealing glance. He flushed and averted his eyes.

Jane said sweetly, "Thank you for a very stimulating conversation, Jackson. Perhaps we can continue it some time when there are no rude people to interrupt."

"Do," Dinah said. "Hire a hall."

She followed Jane out. Jackson let out his breath and sat down violently in his chair.

Dinah put her hand on Jane's arm and pressed it. "Now that I have saved Jackson from the well-known fate which is worse than death—"

"What do you mean?" Jane demanded haughtily.

"You are subtle like a cyclone. I shall be equally subtle—lay off Jackson. He's just a boy."

"He's old enough to take care of himself."

"Certainly, and you're old enough to take care of him. But I repeat, lay off Jackson." Dinah paused outside the drawing room. "Has your bridge improved any?"

"I don't like bridge," Jane said. "I'm only playing as a special favor, because I'm not as selfish as the rest of you are. I don't mind putting myself out for another person."

"Another person such as Jackson."

"I don't believe in the class system and besides he went to Harvard, didn't he? And he's just as good as I am."

"Better," Dinah said. "Much better."

They went inside. Nora and Prye were sitting at the card table talking and dealing out bridge hands.

Jane sat down, looking every inch the martyr, and the game began.

It was three o'clock.

Sands was still in the library sitting at the big desk with his head resting on his hands.

The afternoon dragged, and the minutes moved across his mind as if they had club feet. An old man's afternoon, Sands thought.

Depression crept over him like viscous oil, making his limbs slow and heavy. Only his mind moved, in quick, futile circles like a moth.

THE TELEPHONE rang. He moved his hands through the oil, slowly, and picked up the receiver. It was the call he'd been waiting for and it might mean a hanging.

"Sands? Horton speaking."

"Go ahead."

"Well, it's no go. I've been talking to the Crown attorney and he says you'd be a damn fool to risk a case on the evidence of a graphologist."

"There are other things."

"Circumstantial," Horton said.

"All right."

"Of course I'm positive and you're positive. Can't you get one single witness, say at the Royal York?"

"I can try again."

"Try yourself. Darcy's not too bright."

"I'll try," Sands said, and hung up.

He picked up his hat from the desk, exchanged a few words with the policeman in the hall, and went out to his car.

From the windows of the drawing room Prye saw him leave. He turned to the others at the card table.

"The inspector is leaving."

Jane looked up from her intense study of her cards. "Oh, do be quiet, Paul. I'm trying to play this wretched hand you gave me and I don't know whether to play the king of—"

"My Lord," Dinah said. "Will you stop telling me what cards you're holding?"

"You really shouldn't," Nora said as mildly as possible.

"Well, you shouldn't listen," Jane said, "if you don't want to know. Besides, I

don't want to play any more. It's so *dull*!"

The cards were thrown in without argument. Dinah went over to the table and poured herself a drink.

"So the inspector is gone," she said softly. "I rather like having him around, don't you, Jane?"

"No," Jane said.

"It reminds you of everything, I'll bet. Jane, you have a lovely nature, a heart as soft as thistledown, and a head no harder."

"Shut up," Jane said. "I don't like you and I don't like your voice. If I ever told you what I really thought of you—"

"Go on. You tell me and I'll tell you. Everything goes."

Jane sniffed. "I couldn't be bothered. I'm not malicious."

Dinah was looking at her curiously. "No. No, I don't believe you are malicious. But you're something I don't like."

"Quite an exchange of pleasantries,"

Prye said easily. "May I play too?"

Dinah said, "Keep out of this, Paul."

"I'm in it," Prye said. "I've been in it for some time. It would be a pleasant change for you and Jane to take a crack at me instead of each other. One at a time, girls."

Jane said, "You're too carefree."

"Carefree like the old man of the mountain," Prye said. "Your turn, Dinah."

"I don't like people who know too much about other people."

"I don't," Prye said.

Jane was looking at him very seriously. "Do you know all about people?"

"No. I know a little about some, nothing at all about others."

"About me?" She leaned forward, her eyes fixed on him.

"Nuts," Dinah said, coming over quickly and placing her hand on Jane's shoulder. "If you want to know about yourself, you ask me."

Jane frowned at her and shook her hand from her shoulder. "Go away. I want to talk to Paul. I'm serious. I'm tired of you interfering in everything I do, Dinah. Even Ja—"

"Even Jackson, you were going to say? And Dennis?"

"You struck me," Jane said. "You struck me because Dennis was paying me some perfectly normal attention!"

DINAH GAVE a brief laugh that sounded like a bark. "Normal? I shudder at the company you keep. And the company that keeps you."

Jane jumped to her feet, her face livid with rage. "Who keeps me? You take that back, you—you trollop!"

"Trollop!" Dinah sank into a chair and roared with laughter. "I haven't heard that word since Grandma."

Jane started to walk to the door but Dinah sprang up and stood in the doorway, her arms outspread.

"Going anywhere, Jane?"

"Up to my room. Let me past, please."

"I'll go with you."

"I don't want you to come."

"I will though," Dinah said.

"No! You'll bully me." Jane turned and looked appealingly at Nora. "Make her stay here, please."

Nora said, "Dinah, you'd better stay with me. You're behaving very oddly."

"There's nothing more interesting," Prye said, "than a lady-fight. If I thought either of you ladies knew the rules I'd let you go to it. But I'm afraid you don't. So I'll escort Jane up to her room—"

"I'm not afraid of that trollop," Jane said. "I don't need any escort."

Dinah laughed, rather self-consciously, and moved aside to let her go past. Jane went out and slammed the door.

When Dinah came out of her room dressed to go down to dinner, Revel was waiting for her at the top of the stairs. She hesitated a moment, and then walked toward him, smiling.

"Hello, George. Where have you been hiding all afternoon?"

"In my room," Revel said. "I thought I'd stay out of your way and give you a chance to think things over."

"Think what over?"

He took her arm, and they started to go down the steps.

"The yellow curtains," he said.

"I'm not coming back. It's too late."

Revel smiled. "Funny how we both repeat that. I told Prye it was too late, and you told him, and we've told each other. We're both cowards."

"No."

"I think so. I think we're afraid to start over again because we failed the first time."

"I'm not coming back," Dinah said. "I couldn't recapture that starry-eyed bride effect."

"I don't want you to. Brides are only starry-eyed for a month or so anyway. You can get the same effect with atropine."

She glanced at him quickly. "Can you? I'll have to try it some time."

At the bottom of the steps she walked ahead of him into the dining room.

At exactly seven o'clock Police Constable Clovis relieved Police Constable Barrow on hall duty. Clovis, aware of the tedium of night duty, had gathered beautiful memories during the afternoon to help him pass the time. He sat down and pondered Hedy Lemarr and T-bone steak with onions.

When the guests came out of the dining room he looked the ladies over carefully, decided that none of them could touch Hedy, and went back to his thoughts.

At eleven-thirty everyone had gone upstairs, and Police Constable Clovis tilted his chair against the wall and dozed. His dreams were troubled. Hedy had fallen for him—they were going to the Cocoon Grove—he was in tails and white tie—they danced—they ate—Hedy had lettuce and he had T-bone with onions—Hedy said: "Either those onions go or I go—" He chased her—

He woke up suddenly. His heart was pounding from the chase.

Something was wrong. What was it? He blinked and came awake completely, and the front legs of the chair struck the floor and jolted him.

Someone had turned off the hall light.

He was wide awake now and wishing the hall light were on because there was someone in the hall with him. He opened his mouth to ask who it was but no sound came from him.

The last thing he remembered was a man's voice whispering, "Sleep tight, baby."

Revel crouched over him and felt for his wrist. Then he dragged him into the drawing room, slowly and quietly in the dark.

UPSTAIRS a door opened and shut softly. Dinah stood in the hall a moment, listening, peering through the darkness.

It's all right, she thought. George must have fixed the policeman by this time.

She crept along the wall to the stairs. There was no sound but the quiet slithering of her dress as it touched the wall. It was as if the house had begun to breathe.

I'm at home in the dark, she thought, like a cat. Little whining cats, Prye had said. He'd said something else, too. "I'm not sure you didn't kill them yourself." He hadn't been sure—then. And even now that he was sure, what good did it do him?

At the bottom of the stairs she paused. She could hear the heavy breathing of Constable Clovis through the door of the drawing room. She put her hand on the door and made a small scratching noise with her nails. It sounded like a mouse inside the walls.

"George."

The door opened. "Yes?"

"Leave this open a crack. Is the policeman all right?"

"Fine." Revel laughed softly. "He's dreaming."

"I'm going down now to get it."

"Be careful."

"It's all right. I can hear the steps creak if someone comes."

She didn't want to tell him how frightened she was so she moved away fast toward the basement and opened the door.

The cold air swept past her like ghosts clammy and chill from their graves, laying damp fingers on her cheeks. The steps sighed under her weight.

She opened the door of the billiard room and went in. It was so dark she could feel Dennis' ghost moving around in the room, looking at her with its three eyes.

She snapped the light on, breathing hard.

There was no ghost, only the chair where Dennis had sat holding his billiard cue, and the fireplace with its dead ashes. She went over to the fireplace and got down on her knees in front of it.

Dennis had built a fire here.

That was the important thing. Everything depended on that, on the fastidious and immaculate Dennis building a fire, getting coal dust on his hands. Dennis had built a fire and then he had died. The policemen left the room as it was; they told Jackson not to clean it. That was the second important thing.

She brushed aside the ashes and put her hand on one of the bricks at the back.

It moved under her hand and tumbled out.

She sat back on her heels, staring at the cavity in the wall without moving. It was there. The money was there. She could see the tip of the brown paper.

I had to be right, she thought. It was the only possible place. And because the policeman hadn't let Jackson clean the fireplace they hadn't found out about the clean-out hole at the back.

She put her hand inside the cavity and brought out the package. Fifty thousand dollars. Three men had died because of it and now it was here in her hands, an ordinary package wrapped in brown paper and fastened with twine.

She took off the paper and the twine and put them in the fireplace with some wood on top of them. Then she lit a match and watched the flames grow.

I'll burn it, every dollar of it. Then they can never prove anything against George.

"Dinah!"

The word was a whisper above the crackling of the flames. Dinah turned her head. Jane was standing in the doorway, her hands at her throat as if she were choking.

So she's come, Dinah thought. She's come and I didn't hear the steps creak and she'll kill me.

"Dinah, what are you doing?"

Dinah didn't move. The blood was running out of her head, she was floating, falling, dying—

"Burning," she said. "I'm burning the money."

Her hand darted out toward the fire.

"No!" Jane cried. "No! Wait!" She flung herself across the room, stretching out her hands, reaching for the crisp, sweet, burning bills.

Her hands were in the fire, grasping, clutching, growing black as they burned. The fire leaped out at her hair.

Dinah clung to her knees, pulling her away, screaming and laughing and crying for George. They were burning together with their arms locked, lashed together by the flames, rolling and twisting on the floor like pigs on a barbecue.

The pigs squealed and grew black, and the smell of flesh crept up the stairs and Constable Clovis dreamed he was eating roast pork.

"DEAD ON arrival," said Dr. Hall, senior intern on the accident ward. "I hate these burn cases. What's her name?"

"Stevens," Miss Tomson replied.

"Stevens? I had a Stevens on Accident last week. She was a honey."

"I remember," Miss Tomson said coldly. "This can't be the same one." She looked down at the corpse and shivered. "I'd hate to be burned, wouldn't you?"

Dr. Hall said he certainly would.

* * *

"We're using the sulfadiazine spray," said Dr. Hopkins, chief of staff. "I think she'll pull through."

"How much skin area was burned?" Prye asked.

"About 15 per cent. Still, she's young."

"Any skin grafting to be done?"

"Quite a bit, naturally."

"Her husband wants to volunteer," Prye said. "He feels he's responsible for the accident."

"Dear me. What did he do?"

* * *

"George."

"Yes, darling."

"The money is burned. They can't do anything to you."

"You mustn't talk."

"I guess I haven't any hair, George. I guess I look awful."

"You look fine."

"Are you crying, George?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if this is worse than having a baby. I wonder what kind of babies we'd have."

"We'll have fine babies."

"I'm sorry," Miss Tomson said. "You'll have to leave now, Mr. Revel."

XV

"BUT WHY?" Nora said. "Why did she kill Duncan? She was very fond of him. She talked about him all the time."

"Fond?" Prye repeated. "I don't think either Duncan or Jane was fond of anyone. But she had a sincere respect for him and she was afraid of him. If she hadn't been they might both be alive today. As long as Duncan lived Jane hadn't the courage to disobey or disregard him.

She was under his thumb almost completely. He chose her friends, prevented her from marrying, was squandering the money some of which should have been hers. How she found out that Duncan had withdrawn his last cent to go into this deal with Revel, I don't know. But she had the best opportunity to find out. She was living with Duncan and had access to his mail and his check book. She probably knew about the deal right away. If she didn't she might have suspected something was up when Duncan went all the way to Detroit to come into Canada."

"Why did he?"

"The commuters between Windsor and Detroit keep the border officials pretty busy at certain hours and Duncan wanted to get through with a minimum of inspection. Jane probably didn't understand what the deal was between Duncan and Revel but she grasped the essential fact: that Duncan had withdrawn all his money and was bringing it across the border. Rightfully the money was hers. Duncan had wasted many times his share. So she began to plan.

"The very planning of the murder was indicative of the type of mind behind it. She was not intelligent or quick-witted and she realized it. Her knowledge of her own mind motivated the studied, cautious planning of Duncan's murder: the letter written to me with Duncan's fountain pen, containing whole sentences from one of Duncan's own letters to her; the destruction of the pen afterward; her own poisoning in circumstances that would force us to believe Duncan was the intended victim; the perfectly calculated amount of atropine she took—"

"But Dennis?"

"My guess is that Dennis was sent back to the house by Revel to find the money and that he found it. It's fairly likely that Dennis had been searching for it from the time that Duncan refused to hand it over. He'd searched in the ordinary places. There remained the basement.

"At any rate, Dennis told Jackson in the second-floor hall that he was going down to the basement to practice some billiard shots. Jane overheard the conversation and was instantly suspicious. She had read the letter written by Duncan to Revel and she knew Dennis was Revel's

agent. She knew, too, that the police had let him go and that he had come back. Dennis went to the basement and Jane made her preparations. She had taken Duncan's gun from his clothes when she'd killed him. She started to go down after Dennis. At this point I arrived with Revel and we delayed her for some time. She didn't have to force those tears she shed on Revel. She was pretty frantic at the delay. I made it worse by practically forcing her to come into the drawing room with me. She stayed with me until she thought of an excuse for getting out. She told me she had an idea, that she was going up to her room to verify it. Instead she went down to the basement, shot Dennis, and *then* went upstairs. The whole thing could have been done in three minutes.

"HILDA saw her going into her room immediately after she'd killed Dennis. Jane was bright enough to admit this to Sands. Of course, she was going into her room, she confessed; she had just come from the drawing room, where she had thought of something important, a letter that Duncan had written her from Detroit. The letter had already been destroyed, of course, after she'd copied from it when she wrote the note to me.

"The police graphologist was positive that she had written the note to me after I'd given him a sample of her handwriting. But he could never have proved it. Graphologists today are in much the same position as fingerprint experts were thirty years ago; they are not regarded as scientists. Besides the handwriting of relatives tends to be similar, and Duncan and Jane and Dinah were not only related, they went to the same school. A defense lawyer would have made much of this. So Sands' problem was to get a witness who had seen Jane at the Royal York where Sammy Twist worked. The evidence of Sammy's betting book made it likely that Jane had contacted Sammy at the hotel some time on Friday."

"We were downtown shopping on Friday afternoon," Nora said. "I had my hair done."

"And while you were having your hair done Jane was getting in touch with

Sammy. Probably she'd picked him out earlier in the week. I feel sure she wouldn't have taken the risk of speaking to him personally, so she may have written a note and sent it to him in some way."

"Why did she drag him into it at all?" Nora asked.

"Again part of the too-cautious planning. It was the stupidest and cleverest move she made. I can think of three good reasons for it. The first, her own safety: she had to be sure the poison was identified so she would have the proper treatment. The second, while her poisoning gave her some sort of alibi, the phone call would make her alibi more valid. That is, she could have poisoned herself but she could not have put in that telephone call. The third reason: she wanted the call to come from a man so the police would think a man had killed Duncan.

"Well, Sammy made the phone call and lost the money on the races. This was Sammy's mistake. It made him ripe for the proposal Jane made over the telephone on Monday night. She had already gotten his name and address from one of the desk clerks on Friday in case it would prove necessary. The desk clerk has since remembered her. At any rate, some time on Monday Jane realized the terrible mistake she had made, and that realization meant the end of Sammy."

"Mistake?" Nora said. "I can't think of any."

"I told you Sammy's death made everything plain. Jane contacted Sammy on Friday. What was Sammy's message to the hospital on Saturday?"

"'Miss Stevens is an atropine case.'"

"Exactly," Prye said. "How could anyone but *Jane herself* have known that she would drink out of Duncan's pitcher of water? It was an incredible blunder. She rectified it as well as she could: she killed Sammy so that he couldn't give evidence against her. Sammy had to die because at any moment he might go to the police and tell them that he made the phone call as instructed on *Friday afternoon*. But dead or alive Sammy could tell tales. Sands found his betting book in his locker.

"Jane kept her head well at this time. The murder of Sammy was risky and she didn't know whether he had confided in anyone. In addition to that uncertainty

she had Dinah to deal with. How Dinah found out that Jane was guilty I don't know, but she did. She kept baiting Jane, trying to break her down without success, until Tuesday night. On Tuesday I told Dinah that what Duncan had brought with him was a parcel of money. Before that Dinah had been looking around, and on Tuesday night she was fairly sure where the money was. After the rest of us had retired Dinah went to Jane and passed out several strong hints. She coerced Revel into helping her."

"Why?" Nora asked.

"IT WAS to Revel's advantage to have the money destroyed, since the money and the letter Duncan wrote to him added up to pretty strong evidence against him. This was Dinah's chief motive. Trapping Jane into giving herself away was the secondary one. Jane couldn't afford to ignore any hints. She had killed three times for that money and she went into the basement prepared to kill again if it was necessary."

"She hadn't any weapon," Nora said.

"She didn't need one when she was dealing with a woman. She was remarkably strong. She did admit to Sands that she'd been in some tennis finals. And it required considerable strength to climb down those sheets and up again. That trick automatically eliminated your mother and Aspasia. It also eliminated Jackson, but for a different reason. Jackson's room is on the third floor and his using a bathroom on the second floor would have been too foolhardy.

"When Dinah threw the money into the fireplace she performed the one act that could have saved her life. Jane was lost to everything but the necessity of rescuing the money. The sight of it burning drove her insane."

* * *

"Are you feeling better, Mrs. Revel?" Sands asked.

"Much better, thanks. Where is George?"

"He's waiting in the hall. I'm leaving town tomorrow. I decided to see you first."

"Why?"

Sands smiled. "I thought I'd give you hell."

"I don't care," Dinah said. "I don't care about anything now that my hair's growing in."

"Did you think I wasn't aware that it was Miss Stevens?"

"She's fooled a lot of people. When did you become aware?"

"After Sammy Twist's death," Sands said. "Before that I had only a list of suspicious questions: why didn't she taste the eyedrops in the water she drank? I've experimented and found the taste very strong. Why was atropine used at all? Dr. Prye supplied the answer to this—atropine has a perfect antidote. Why was the poison administered so that its effects began at the church in a crowd of people with a hospital just around the corner? Why was she so completely ignorant of her brother's affairs though they lived together? After Sammy's death a number of other things cropped up in addition to the conclusive fact of the telephone call."

"Prye told me of that," Dinah said.

"There were the sheets, a typically female inspiration. There was her attitude toward you: she took too much from you, it wasn't the natural reaction."

"She required some wearing down," Dinah said.

"And how did you know she did it?"

Dinah smiled. "I knew what I'd have done to Duncan if I'd been in her shoes."

* * *

"Nora."

"Yes, Mother."

"Nora, I bought a copy of Emily Post's *Etiquette* today. I'm afraid you can't be married decently for some time."

"Can't I?"

"She says not," Mrs. Shane sighed. "A small wedding, perhaps. A large one, no. I don't want to hurry you, of course—"

"Mother, you're an old fraud. You're dying to get rid of me."

"I should like to get settled. And those fifteen coffee—"

"Send them back, darling. Paul and I were married yesterday at the City Hall."

"Dear heaven," Mrs. Shane said piously.



DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN

By STEWART STERLING

THE SCREAM knifed sharply through the March twilight, cutting above the grumble of the police-boat's exhaust, the *hrrrush* of the bow-wave. Steve Koski slid aft from the pilot-house, squinted across the river's dark mirror. Against the far shore black dominoes lay side by side—canal barges moored under the towering gloom of Manhattan's dimmed-out financial district.

"What you make of that, Sarge?"

"The dame who yelled? Ah . . . !" The blocky-shouldered individual at the *Vigilant's* wheel made a pushing gesture with one huge palm. "Was only one of them barge floozies getting beat up."

"Think so?"

"Her old man has prob'ly looked too long upon the whiskey when it is red."

"Use some skull. She'd have hollered more than once if she was getting a mauling. That baby was scared." Koski whipped off his felt hat, shielded his eyes from the port running light. The reflection from the water ruddied his long narrow face, high-lighted the prominent cheekbones so he looked more like a weathered cigar-store Indian than a plainclothes lieutenant. His gray eyes searched the shoreline. "Run in, Irish."

The Sergeant made a half-revolution of the spokes. "One will get you five if it is anything more than a wrangle for the Domestic Relations magistrate." He sighed. "Far as that goes, I have a certain matter of more-or-less domestic relations to take care of, myself—if we could so kindly wind up this tour of duty."

"Old glamour-pants Joe! Lothario Mulcahey of the Marine Division! Hah! Little more to starboard. Where the lantern is, there." Koski indicated a yellow spark winking beside the cabin of the end barge. "Might be a kid in the water." He ran knotty-knuckled fingers through hair wind-bleached to the color of new rope. "No.

Looks like somebody hurt, on deck."

"Always somebody getting banged up on them hulks." Joe Mulcahey scowled at the silhouettes milling around the pinpoint of illumination. "The farmers who handle them barges is forever busting a leg falling down a hatch or getting caught in a bight of the tow-line."

Piers emerged from the murk. White lettering on the high stern of the barge became distinguishable: *Anna Flannery, Rondout, N. Y.* Koski raised a warning hand.

The Sergeant gave the clutch-lever a touch of reverse; the patrol-boat lost way. "If there has been a mishap, it is funny none of them kids is running for help, Steve."

"Might be somebody's already gone. Run out a stern line." Koski edged past the pilot-house to the foredeck as the blunt-bowed thirty-two footer nuzzled the barge-hull. He swung across to the battered rub-rail; peered up on deck.

Five figures clustered around the lantern: a man and a woman, two young boys, a small girl.

Koski called: "Everything all right?"

The taller boy, squatting beside the lantern, pivoted around on his haunches. He wore overalls and a cloth cap; his eyes were round with alarm.

"Pa! The cops!" He pointed to Mulcahey, busy looping a line over one of the barge cleats. "They's a shield on that one's cap."

"Take it easy." Koski went up over the rail, moved toward the group. "What's the matter here?"

The man looked over his shoulder, grunted something unintelligible. The woman muttered and made a grab for the tousle-haired girl. "You keep *away* from it, Dorothy. It's bad enough for Herbie to go an' drag up a terrible thing like that. . . ."

"How'd I know!" The younger boy, in knickers and a sweater too large for him, knelt beside a black metal suitcase with the lid open. "Jeeze, as many times as I been fishin' for blue-claws—"

"Shuddup!" The father rubbed at sooty stubble on his chin. "Let the cop ask you what he wants to know."

"I was only telling him we didn't know what was in it when we hauled it up. . . ."

"Shuddup!" The man made a threatening gesture with the back of his hand. The little girl buried her head in her mother's skirts, flung her arms around the woman's legs, began to bawl.

Koski got close enough to see a lumpy bulk wrapped in wet fabric, salmon-tinted under the smoky flare. Extra padding of cloth had been wadded into each end of the canvas-lined case so the contents would fit tight.

The older boy stood up, stuck his fists in the pockets of his overalls. "It was awful heavy. I hadda help Herbie pull in on it. We thought maybe they was something in it Pa could hock. . . ."

"They wouldn't ever have laid a finger to it—" the woman shuddered, "if they'd any idea—"

Koski put a hand on the wet cloth for an instant. The thing beneath was cold, soft, slithery. He swung up the lid of the suitcase, closed it. "Where'd you fish this up, Herbie?"

The boy pointed. "Off the side of the pier, there. 'Bout twenny minutes ago. We was after crabs; best place to catch 'm is off the side, there."

"He hooked it right by the handle," his brother said. "We didn't know if the line would bust or not, haulin' up. . . ."

Herbie stared at the lid. "I'd never lugged it all the way over here—Jeeze—if I'd known what was in it. . . ."

"All right," Koski snapped the tinny catches that fastened the lid. He straightened up, took out a notebook with a worn, black leather cover. "What's your name, son?"

"Herbert Gurlid. You going to arrest me, huh?"

The man growled: "Why would he run you in, now, for Pete's sake! You ain't done nothing."

"Spell that G-U-R-L-I-D?" Koski tilted the notebook toward the lantern, so he

could see to write. "Live here on the barge, mister?"

"Three years, regular." Gurlid rubbed his hands along the thighs of his wash-faded dungarees. "Winters here. Summers on the Erie. Never any trouble with the po-lice. You ask anyone. Enough trouble keeping your head above water, with a family, three kids. . . ."

"Yair." Koski put the notebook back in his pocket, hefted the suitcase. "Any idea who this was?"

"Crysake, no." The bargeman spat overside, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "How could you tell anything . . . by that!"

"Maybe we can't. But the guy who hacked him up better not count on that." The amber light upspilling from the lantern varnished grim lines into Koski's long face. "No notion who dropped the valise into the water, either?"

GURLID shook his head. Herbie said: "Uh, uh." The little girl took her head out of her mother's skirt long enough to cry: "I saw him!"

The woman caught hold of the child. "Don't you be telling any lies now, Dorothy!"

"Wait a minute." Koski scrunched down so his head was on a level with Dorothy's. "Who'd you see?"

She dug a fat fist into the corner of one eye. "A big man. Onna wharf."

The bargeman swore, thickly. "Don't pay no attention to her. She don't know what the hell it's all about."

Dorothy stuck out her chin. "I did so see him."

"He have this suitcase?" Koski made a shushing movement toward Gurlid.

"Mmm, hmm. He was luggin' it down the wharf."

"She's makin' it up," the older boy burst out. "She never told us she'd seen the suitcase before."

Koski held up both hands. "One at a time. How long ago was it you saw the big man, Dorothy?"

"Around about . . ." she puckered up her face, "quarter pas' six."

"Ah, she's nuts," Herbie jeered. "She wasn't even on the pier half an hour ago."

"It was this *morning*." The child began to cry. "An' I know it was around about

that time because the gong just rung over to the fish market."

Koski looked up at Gurlid.

"Crysaque, mister, I don't know. The kid was playin' on the slip right after breakfast. Soon's it was light."

Koski put his hand on Dorothy's head, rumpled her hair. "What'd the man look like? Was he as big as your father?"

"Mh, hmm." She stopped weeping, eyed him warily. "Bigger."

"What kind of clothes was he wearing?"

"I don't remember."

"Remember his hat? His overcoat?"

"I don't b'lieve he had any. Any overcoat, I mean. I don't know if he had a cap. . . ."

"Know him if you saw him again?"

She nodded.

"How would you know him? Did he have a mustache? Or a beard?"

"He was hurt." The announcement was defiant.

"Oh!" Koski crinkled up the corners of his eyes; held out his hand. "You mean he was lame? Limping? Or where was he hurt?"

She put small fingers on his palm, timidly. "His face. It was all bandaged up."

"Across here?" The Lieutenant ran one finger across his forehead.

"All over his chin." She clasped her free hand over her mouth, close up under her nose. "Like this. A big white bannage."

Gurlid tapped Koski's shoulder. "Listen, mister. I don't like the idea her getting her name in the papers saying she could spot this fella. Maybe he comes down here some fine night an' Dot winds up in the river, see? I don't like it."

"Keep your hair on." Koski made one more try, with the child. "How'd the man get on the pier? Come in a car? Or walk?"

"I only saw him onna wharf. Before I went over on South Street for oyster shells for the winna-box." She pointed to a box nailed beneath the white curtains of the cabin window.

"Okay." Koski patted her shoulder. "You're a help, Dorothy. Now I want you to do one more thing for me."

She waited gravely.

"Don't tell anyone you saw this man.

Understand? Not anybody at all."

"A secret?"

"That's it." He turned to the boys. "Show me where you dragged this thing up."

They led him across a bridge of barges, jumping from one to the next, over yawning gaps with swiftly flowing tidewater beneath, as if they were merely playing hopscotch. He scrambled up the string-piece, crossed the pier after them. A solitary drunk watched them owlishly from his perch on a huge, iron bollard.

"Right about here," Herbie pointed.

"Yuh, that's right." The older boy indicated a row of splintered wood-fibers. "Here's where we dragged it over."

KOSKI looked around. There were no barges on this side of the wharf. A man might have dropped the suitcase over-side without anyone noticing unless the pilot of a passing tug should have observed him from out in the river. "All right, boys. Don't ask around about this bird with his face bandaged. But if you hear anyone else talking about him—or if you see him—hike for a cop. Ask him to call Koski, Harbor Precinct."

They said they would.

He went back to the barge, took the suitcase, dropped down to the deck of the *Vigilant*.

Mulcahey put down the comic section he was reading by the binnacle light. "All quiet on the Potomac?"

"This guy is quiet." He laid the suitcase flat in the cockpit. "Take it away, Irish. Want to put this on ice before it spoils."

The Sergeant cast off, backed the patrol-boat out into the tidestream. "You're not telling me there is a stiff in that? Unless maybe it was a contortionist?"

"Part one, only. To be continued. Maybe." When the *Vigilant* hit her stride, Koski thumbed back the catches, got the lid up, pulled the cloth away. "Kid fished it up on a crab line. Sweet?"

"Holy Mother!" Mulcahey swallowed hard. "What kind of filthy devil would be hackin' up a dead body like that, now!"

"Gent who wanted to be sure we didn't identify his victim. All I know about the killer is he wore a bandage over the lower part of his mugg. For the same reason. So we couldn't identify *him*."

"That lug who runs the barge, mayhap?"

"Oh, sure. Bird who's been workin' the river tows for three years. Raising a family of five in a two-room cabin with no electric or running water. So you'd figure he was a criminal because his kid happens to dredge up a corpse!"

"Since I first started scuffing grooves in the pavement of the eighteenth parish," Mulcahey braced himself against the wash of a railroad tug, "it has been my understanding the powers that be insist on detainment of the person reporting a homicide."

"Want me to take a ten-year-old kid into custody? Make with the gas. Maybe the Medical Examiner's boys can tell something from this guy's insides."

"They would have no trouble doing the same with me, after giving that the once-over."

Koski pulled the wadding out of the suitcase—strips of torn sheeting, a ripped pillowslip. Something that had ben caught in a fold of the fabric clattered to the cockpit floor, rolled in a corner against the tool locker. He retrieved it—a polished cylinder of brown plastic about an inch long. On one end was a narrow band of copper; from the other extended two metal prongs. He held it up so the Sergeant could see.

"Looks like one them wall plugs for an electric fixture, Steve. Some kind of a jack-plug."

"Plug, all right. Crystal."

"Huh?"

"Crystal. Inside this." Koski tapped the plastic with a fingernail. "For a radio set."

"Is it now?" Mulcahey threw the clutch into neutral, let the *Vigilant* coast into the quiet water of the Battery Basin. "From the looks of them mutilated remains, I would deduce they been worked over by something considerably more brutal than a loudspeaker."

"Yair." Koski remained in his crouching position, with the bit of plastic in his fingers, for some seconds after the policeboat came to rest rocking gently on its afterwake. "Sure. But under the right circumstances—or the wrong ones—this thing might murder a hell of a lot of men, too."

He closed the suitcase, carried it ashore.

II

KOSKI SNAPPED the metal catches, pressed the lock to one side. "It's not much to go on, Inspector." He lifted the lid of the suitcase.

"Ahrrrr!" Deputy Inspector Nixon pressed his lips tightly; squinted as if his eyes hurt from the light funneling down out of the green conical shade over the table. "Don't you ever get the jeebies, thinking about the floaters the Marine Division turns over to the Bureau?"

"This one's no floater. Hadn't been in the water long enough to bloat. Somebody packed him in the suitcase, just like this; dunked him in the East River. Barge-kid fishing for crabs hooked onto the handle, dredged it up."

"First stiff I ever saw who really went to hell in a hand-basket." Nixon ran fingers through graying hair, made a gargling noise in the back of his throat. "Where's the rest of him?"

Koski spread his palms. "That's all the murderer could get in one suitcase."

"Just enough so the press boys can drag out those torso headlines. Holy Joe! Get busy with your grappling irons. Bring us something to work with. We can't tell you anything from this." Nixon jerked a thumb disgustedly toward the raw stump of flesh. "He was male, white and over twenty-one. He'd never had his appendix out. What more you expect?"

The man from the Harbor Squad pulled down the corners of his mouth. "Thought you Identification experts were supposed to have comparative tables on weights, heights, chest measurements. . . ."

Nixon lit a cigarette, snorted twin jets of smoke from his nostrils. "Department of Miracles. Two doors on your left. If this damn corpse had even one arm—"

"Make a stab at it. How old was he? How much'd he weigh? How tall would he have been?"

Nixon tilted his head over on one side, assumed a fixed sweet smile. "You wouldn't like to know his religion or how long had it been since he'd slept with his wife, would you?"

"Might help, at that."

The Deputy Inspector groaned. "All right, all right. I'll put somebody on it soon's the Criminal Alien boys give us a

breathing spell. They've got me dizzy."

Koski tapped the damp metal of the suitcase, irritably. "Don't stick it on your spile and forgetsis. It could be important. Somebody took a lot of trouble to see this lad wasn't easy to identify."

"He got away with it, too. If you only had something for us to work with. . . ."

"There was a crystal."

"My, my. Should have brought it along. Lieutenant. You always expect us to be clairvoyant—"

"You wouldn't have made anything out of it," Koski pushed his hat back on his forehead, stood with hands in his hip pockets. "It was probably dropped in the suitcase accidentally. I turned it over to the technical lab. Kind they use in short-wave sets. Might have belonged to this guy. More likely to the murderer. I'm interested in any gent who runs around with spare short-wave parts, these days."

"Well, listen! Don't expect us to identify your suspects. Tough enough to trace the cadavers."

"Then there was this." Koski touched the sodden cloth. "Strips torn from a sheet. Old sheet. Part of a pillowslip."

Nixon's eyebrows went up. "Laundry mark?"

"Might be. Might have been the owner's mark. Hotel, maybe." Koski held up the segment that had been packed between the right arm-stump and the canvas lining of the case. "Three vertical lines and a cross-bar."

"Not a hotel. Not one of the big ones, anyway. I'll put Yulch on it; he's got every cleaning plant from Washington east in that card index." The Deputy Inspector rubbed the fabric tentatively between thumb and forefinger. "Cheap stuff. Sort they use in buck-a-night joints."

"Likely. Shoot this over to the Examiner's office soon's you're through with it, huh? They might find out what he had to eat for his last meal."

"That'll be a big help."

"Give me a bell at Pier One when you've got something on him?"

"If we get anything." Nixon grimaced at the contents of the suitcase, let the lid down gently. "Want a check on the luggage, too?"

Koski nodded. "Regular leather-goods store wouldn't carry that kind of junk.

Probably came from one of the gyp stores near the midtown hotels. If it didn't come from out of town. Be a manufacturer's lot number stamped on the inside of the frame, won't there?"

"Sometimes is. Sometimes not. Only take two men the best part of a week to run that down." The Deputy Inspector snapped out the light over the table. "Some day you're going to bring in a nice clean suicide with his name and address on a label sewn inside his coat pocket. Then I'll drop dead!"

"Don't put that on the bulletin board. Somebody'd take you up on it." Koski went out.

His heels clicked along the marble floor of the corridor as far as the dingy black lettering proclaiming *Missing Persons Bureau*.

There was one clerk in the office—a pudgy man of about thirty—picking feebly at a loose-jointed typewriter. He swung around, pushed the green visor of an eyeshade up on his forehead. "For the luva Pete, Lieutenant! Don't tell me you're in a swivet for some rush data. I got this report to get out. . . ."

"Only take you a minute, Edgey." Koski unlatched the rail-gate, stalked in.

"Yuh? Last time you told me that, I spent half the night—"

"Hoist your stern, fella. Lemme have your new cards. For, say, the last forty-eight hours."

Patrolman Edge eyed him suspiciously. "This is only the beginning, folks," he intoned, hollowly. "Only the be-gin-ning." He moved to a row of steel files, pulled out a drawer. "I been trying to get them closed cases typed out since I come on duty at six o'clock. Every time I get started some wise guy comes along—" He stacked a sheaf of 5x7 cards on top of the file. "Who you looking for? Some dame who did a Brody?"

KOSKI shuffled the cards. He wasn't interested in Mrs. Leonie Amarita's daughter, Isabelle, *aged fifteen, dark-eyed, brunette, last seen wearing a brown-and-green plaid coat and apple-green felt hat* or in George Purman Bostock, *aged seven, blond, blue eyes, last seen wearing a blue corduroy on playground of Public School Number One Twenty-two*.

There were about twenty cards; he went over them carefully. The only one he came back to a second time described Ansel Gjersten, *thirty, brown hair and black eyes, engineer, yacht "Seavett."* At the bottom of the card, on the line marked PERSON REPORTING DISAPPEARANCE, was a slanting scrawl: *Zachariah Cardiff.* Beneath, next the words RELATIONSHIP TO MISSING PERSON, was written *Employer.*

Koski held up the card. "What's about this one, Edgy?"

The clerk thrust his index finger into his right ear, rotated his fist vigorously. "Was a phone-in. That's Sebe Levine's writin'. Sebe's on the day side. Why? Got a lead to this Guh-jersten?"

"Yersten," Koski corrected. "The G is silent, as the *p* in psychoanalysis. Seems to be a Scandahoovian. I've got part of a guy who was hacked up and dropped in the East River. From what we've seen of him, he could be thirty as well as any other age. There isn't enough of him to tell about the brown hair or black eyes." He studied the card. "Last seen at Rodd's Dock, Brooklyn, five-thirty Sunday, the eighteenth."

"Yeah. And that's peculiar." Edge jabbed a thumbnail at the date. "We don't generally get requests to shag after guys who have done a duck-out for anyhow two, three days after they do the vanishing act. With a kid, of course, his folks are liable to throw a hysteric half an hour after the little darling was last noticed talking to a swarthy-looking foreigner on the way home from the A and P. But with guys old enough to button their own pants, it's usually a couple days, at least. But Z. Cardiff calls up at quarter past eight this ayem to notify us about his hired hand who only dropped out of the pitcher las' night."

"This Cardiff took his time, at that." Koski scowled at the ink lines drawn through the blanks next the headings: FORMER RESIDENCE, PLACES FREQUENTED, RESIDENCES OF RELATIVES, ETC., and PERSONAL ASSOCIATES, FRIENDS OR RELATIVES MOST LIKELY TO KNOW OF MOVEMENTS OR WHEREABOUTS OF MISSING PERSON OR WITH WHOM HE WOULD BE LIKELY TO COMMUNICATE. "On a yacht, 'missing' most likely means 'overboard.' Twelve hours is a hell of a long time to

be overboard, in March. Make a copy of this for me, Edgy."

THE CLERK puffed out his cheeks, blew a long breath, reluctantly ripped the report blank out of his typewriter. "I'd give you six, two and even, this lug has joined the Navy an' gone to see the Japs. You oughta see the list of able-bodied males who done a skipola from the boozum of their families in order to wear them bell-bottom pants. You want *all* this stuff on here?"

"Yair. Maybe this Gjersten wasn't so able-bodied. Says there he wore glasses."

"That's a thing I never could unnerstand." The clerk attacked the keys of his machine. "Can't a lad who wears cheaters haul up an anchor or swab down a deck as good as one who can read all the fine type at the bottom of the card?" The keys clattered. "Anyway, this cluck might of been in the Navy before. Had tattooing on his left bicep."

"I guess there's a law says you have to be a gob before you let somebody stick a needleful of indelible ink in your epidermis! Snap it up, Superman."

Half an hour later Koski marched down the ramp at the Battery Basin. A big fireboat with its line of gunlike nozzles lay on the other side of the Basin; compared to her the chunky black hull of the policeboat with its tiny pilot-house was a marine midget. But there was a sturdiness about the way the *Vigilant* strained at her lines in the backwash from a fast-moving lighter that said the smaller craft could take care of herself when the going was rough. Something told Koski the going might be rough, right about now.

He vaulted over the *Vigilant's* rail. Mulcahey reclined against a pile of tarpaulin in the corner of the cockpit. His mouth was open; his eyes closed. The Lieutenant bent down, smeared his hand over the boiled-ham countenance.

"Up an' at 'em, Irish."

"Steve?" The Sergeant blinked resentfully. "I would call it a dog's life, working with you. Only now and again, a pooch gets some chance to sleep."

"If you'd lay off some of those dizzy dames you go out with, you might not be dead on your feet at eight pee-em. Come out of your coma. Twist her tail."

"I hope," Mulcahey thumbed the starter, throttled the motor down to a steady grumble, "we are not about to grapple for any more of this piecemeal cadaver?"

Koski made a neat coil of the bowline over left hand and elbow. "We're about to locate the *Seavett*. Eighty-foot, bridge-deck, twin-screw job. Supposed to be over at Rodd's, getting a propeller straightened."

The Sergeant lifted the engine-box cover, tightened up the grease cup on the water pumps. "We could do with a short session at Randall's Island for repairin' the ravages of time an' tide, ourselves."

"A week from Tuesday. If not later. We got a job of work to do. It calls for overtime and hot-shot delivery, Joe."

The hundred and eighty horses inside the engine-housing grumbled—began to roar. Koski switched on the running lights. The *Vigilant* thundered away from her berth. She shot out of the Basin, pitched violently in a ferry wash, angled over toward Buttermilk Channel. A gray silhouette with sharply raked funnels and hooded guns on the foredeck slid across the police-boat's bow in the direction of the Navy Yard. Over by the tip of Governors Island, the red eye of a tug peered from beneath the black *V* of a derrick barge.

MULCAHEY adjusted the timing lever; the motor raised its voice. The patrol-boat's forefoot lifted slightly; her stern squatted in a white churning of froth. "Ordinarily I would not connect a piece of butcher-work like this mangled carcass with the kind of people who play around on a pleasure hull, Steve. It is more the Legs Diamond type treatment—the sort of bluggy operation Dutch Schultz might of thought up for one of his intimate pals."

"Don't go gangster-movie on me. We're just checking. Captain of this *Seavett* notified Centre Street his engineer was A.W.O.L. Might not have any connection. No report of violence."

"Who owns this rich man's toy?"

"Lloyds says she was bought four years ago by Lawford Ovett."

"Oh, oh! The shipping magnet? One who owns them banana boats?"

"Yair. I called up to see if the yacht was in commission. She is. But Ovett's

not aboard. Maid at his apartment says the old geezer's just back from a meeting of the Shipping Council and has gone to bed and can't be disturbed." Koski fished a charred corn-cob from his pocket, fumbled with a red rubber pouch. "Trying to finagle some more vessels, probably. Tin fish have made quite a dent in the Ovett fleet. Their *Santa Mercedes* was sunk only a couple weeks ago. Crew was just picked up off Charleston."

"Twelve days in open lifeboats; I saw them in the newsreel. Like dead men, they looked." Mulcahey slewed the *Vigilant* in toward the Brooklyn shore to avoid a hot-shot freight ferry.

"Some of them *were* dead, but those lads didn't get their pictures taken. Not sixty fathoms down. One of the lifeboats didn't show up." Koski struck two matches, sucked their combined flame into the bowl of the corn-cob. "Wonder what you think about, waiting like that. You probably go nuts. Be the best thing."

"I tell you something about them lugs who sail the seven seas, coach. I never give them much thought one way or the other before this fracas begins—except to fish a few of them out of the briny when they had too much of a load on. But you got to hand it to them for being the number one tough guys, now."

"Yair. Takes guts."

"Some of the lads been sunk six or seven times; keep going back for another dish of the same."

"The odds are bad enough, bucking the swastikas, on the other side. But they'd be a hell of a lot worse if some heel on *our* side was stacking the cards against our own ships." Koski smoked silently for a minute. "Run right up to the bulkhead if you don't see the yacht. We'll ask the watchman."

The *Vigilant* skirted Red Hook, swung around the Erie Basin, nosed in toward the shipyard at the mouth of the Gowanus. Ranks of ships lay three-deep along the docks; rust-streaked freighters, mud-gray tankers, a knifelike subchaser, two snub-snouted minelayers. In the dry-dock a broken-down passenger liner was being converted into a transport. There was no sign of any yacht.

Mulcahey gave the clutch-lever a touch of reverse, braked the police-boat's way.

The black hull shouldered gently against the slimy-green planking between the piers.

"Hi!" Koski called up to a man with an electric lantern. "Seen anything of an eighty-footer? The *Seavett*?"

"Ain't seen her since last night. She dropped hawsers along about suppertime." The watchman spat down through the luminous green of the patrol-boat's starboard running light. "She might as well of left. The Yard couldn't get around to her for another six months, way work's piling up around here."

"Know where she headed?"

"City Island, think they said. She's one them Cee Gee Volunteer Auxiliaries—doin' patrol duty out on the Sound somewheres. What's matter? Something wrong?"

"Looking for one of her crew. Much obliged." For a long minute Koski stared across at a spark of light which showed from inside a tanker through a hole in the bent and twisted plates at its waterline. "Allez oop, Irish."

Mulcahey grunted. "Course to City Island would take her right past the barge where the Gurlid kid was fishing. We might be getting hot, skipper."

"Yair." The spark flared up into a dazzling glare as an acetylene torch burst into action inside the damaged hull. "You mix up a short-wave crystal, a Coast Guard Auxiliary and a stiff like that—there could be something fricasseeing. The recipe calls for rapid stirring."

III

THE RIVER was a dark tunnel under the shadowy span of bridges. The *Vigilant* got up to twenty knots, her bow uptilted like a runner's head thrown back for air. Koski stood in the cockpit, bracing himself against the bulkhead, scanning the gloom ahead for lights which might signify an eighty-footer moving north.

As they surged past the tall stacks marking the Navy Yard, he caught a stealthy movement in the field of his binoculars. A black boat, low of freeboard and displaying no lights, was slipping in toward the Queens shore.

"Junkie." He pointed her out to the Sergeant. "Probably got a load of

manila off one of the supply scows."

"We could nail him, skipper."

"Not now. Looks like Eustape's tub. We'll get around to him in due course."

"Give him enough rope, that otter'll set himself up in the cordage business."

"He better learn the jute business. It'll come in handier where he's headed."

The giant span of the Triborough Bridge came into view as they sped past the upper end of Welfare Island. They circled an Army dredge, felt the slew of the Hell Gate race, boomed along past a sand-barge tow toward North Brother and the Sound. There were plenty of slowly moving lights on the dark expanse toward College Point and Whitestone—but none that might have been the *Seavett*.

A Coast Guard cutter anchored inside Throgs Neck pointed a tapering finger of white at them, cut off its searchlight, as soon as the beam touched the square-green flag whipping from the *Vigilant's* jack-staff.

"Run over, Joe. Maybe they know a thing."

The patrol-boat swerved inshore. A hundred feet away, Koski cupped his hands, bellowed: "Seen an eighty-foot Cee-Gee Auxiliary? Going down Sound?"

"Five . . . minutes . . . ago." The hail came faintly over the rumble of the heavy-duty motor. "Need . . . any . . . help?"

"No," Koski hollered. "Much oblige."

"I am cutting the corners as close as I dare, Steve." The Sergeant shaved the inshore side of a black nun-buoy whose tall cone teetered over against the drag of the current until its white number was almost under the surface. The clear, green jewel of Stepping Stones light came up around the Neck.

"Thar she, Irish," Koski nodded toward a white spark far to the left of the lighthouse. "Won't be long now."

It was another five minutes before they made out her outline against the dim riding lights of the lumber fleet anchored off City Island. The *Seavett* had a corsair-like sheer and a slant-front, streamlined deckhouse. She was moving along at a steady five knots.

The *Vigilant* crawled up on her starboard quarter. When they were a hundred yards away, Koski put the beam of the flashlight on the yacht's deckhouse. He

held it on the varnished woodwork and plate glass long enough to make sure he had the helmsman's attention; then threw the beam down toward the water, reached up and held his hat over it so that only enough light escaped to illuminate the police flag. The *Seavett* didn't alter course or slow her speed.

"There," Mulcahey observed, "is one dumb dilly. How do they let farmers like that fly a Cee-Gee Auxiliary flag?"

"I wish we had one of those one-pounders aboard. I'd put the fear of the Lord into him. Run across her bows, Irish."

The *Vigilant* crept up to the yacht's counter, came abreast, forged ahead, cut in sharply.

Profanity belched from the *Seavett's* deckhouse. She slewed westward, heeling over heavily. Mulcahey followed her around, nosed the police-boat against her, amidships. Koski swung over to the yacht.

"What the hell's the matter with you! Don't you know a police flag when you see it?"

THE MAN who stumbled angrily out of the deckhouse was short and stumpy-legged; the plump beer-belly made his uniform coat a little too tight. His nose was too big for his face and networked with fine purple threads; sacks of puffy flesh under the prominent eyeballs gave him a toadlike appearance. The smell of liquor was strong on his breath.

"Dammit, you got no right to stop us. We're on Coast Guard duty."

"Y'don't say. We work with the Cee-Gee, too. And when a cop-boat pulls up beside you, you stop or you'll get your ears pinned back. You Cardiff?"

"Sme."

"Koski. Lieutenant. Harbor detail. Drop your hook."

"What's all the rumpus about?"

"Get your hook down. Talk afterwards."

Cardiff went forward, threw off lashings, tossed his plowshare anchor overside—*kullunge*.

He came back to the deckhouse, put his gear in reverse, took a strain on the anchor-rode, cut the motor.

"Satisfied?"

"Hell of a long way from it." Koski

was curt. "Heard from your man, Gjersten?"

"Don't much expect to, now."

"Why not?"

Cardiff looked at him out of the corner of his eyes. "If he's gone overboard, somebody'd have picked him up before this. He could handle himself all right in the water. So I imagine he just skipped ship."

"Didn't figure that way this morning when you phoned headquarters."

"Didn't figure one way or the other. No basis for figuring. Nobody saw Ansel go ashore. Other hand, nobody saw him go overboard. One of us would most likely have heard him yell, even if we were under way."

"You saw Gjersten last at Rodd's Yard?"

"Yuh. Just before we left."

"Who else was on board?"

The Captain held his left hand out in front of him, studied the palm as if he were reading from a note. "Missus Overt was down in the main cabin. Mister Hurlihan was down there, too. He's general superintendent of the Lines; comes around every so often to discuss . . . uh . . . business. Then there was Frankie—he's our Filipino cook and bottle-washer—he'd have been forward in the galley. And me." He closed his palm abruptly, glanced up.

Koski pushed past him into the deckhouse. The only light came from an underlit chart-glass, forward of the mahogany wheel; the dim glow made mirrors of the deckhouse windows. Beyond the chart-glass, up against the port windows, was a gray metal cabinet with vernier dials, switches, a one-piece telephone instrument in a nicked fork at the side.

"You only carry two in your crew, Cardiff?"

"Supposed to have four. Been short-handed since Pearl Harbor. I don't squawk. I'd probably be drawing Navy pay myself, if it wasn't for a leak in my pump valves. There's only me and Frankie left. He's not sure of his citizen status, or maybe he'd try to get in as a mess-boy."

"Who handles the short-wave apparatus, here? Gjersten?"

"No. I do. What little handling it

gets. We're restricted to the Coast Guard fixed frequency now. Mr. Ovett had it put in a couple of years ago so he could use the ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore channels. All that's out, times like these. Don't use it once a week. Nothing to it, anyway. Press a button to talk, listen for the buzzer when the control officer wants to give us an order."

Koski snapped a switch at the side of the set. A glass button glowed red. "Gjersten have any pay coming to him?"

"His wages so far this month. About seventy-five dollars." Cardiff watched the Lieutenant twiddle the directional antennae. "Not as if he'd signed on with the Line. If he'd jumped ship there, he'd forfeit it all. Here, it'll be waiting, if he calls for it. I hope it's the last money I have to turn over to him, though I don't know where I'll get a man to take his place."

"Good riddance, hah?"

"I'd have given Ansel the bounce long ago, even though he was a wiz around those heavy-duty gas motors. But he was a disagreeable guy. Never did anything without griping. Worst of it was, he knew he could get away with it."

"**D**RAG with the owner?" Koski turned up the volume control, but the tubes weren't warm enough to snap the set into action.

Cardiff pointed to the deck at his feet. "She hired him."

"That way? Isn't she pretty well along in years to be mucking around with a thirty-year-old yacht-hand?"

The Captain's eyes bulged; his forehead wrinkled. "She's a long way from being on the retired list."

"Thought Ovett was around seventy. . . ."

"Sure. But she's not Missus Lawford Ovett. His daughter-in-law. Son's wife. Twenty-five or so." The man's cupped palm described a sinuous vertical movement in the air.

Koski's lips made a soundless O. "Where's young Ovett?"

"We don't see much of Merrill."

"Not around last night?"

"Well . . . he was . . . and he wasn't." The Captain appeared to be rummaging in the drawer for something he couldn't find. "We hadn't seen him or heard from him—at least I hadn't—for a couple of

months. Then yesterday he showed up out of a clear sky while we were lying there at Rodd's Dock."

"What time?"

"About high tide. Say five. He just walked on board without saying where he'd been or what he'd been doing." Cardiff closed the drawer, cleared his throat "Kind of surprised . . . everybody."

"Somebody caught with his pants down?"

"No, no. Nothing like that."

"Was there a fight?"

"Oh, no." Cardiff fidgeted. "No rough stuff."

"Did Hurlihan clear out?"

"Not right away." The Captain looked over his shoulder, made sure there was no one on the deck outside. "Missus Ovett sent Frankie up to the bridge to tell me we'd run around to the East River and drop the super off at the club float, foot of Wall Street. So I sent Frankie over to Rodd's machine shop to locate Ansel. He was trying to get hold of a template—so we could straighten out the propeller ourselves. Few minutes after they came back, I took the tub across the river. We could only make about quarter-speed; the fog was thicker than a steam-bath and running on one propeller makes her vibrate so I thought she'd shake her guts out."

"Gjersten didn't mix in this family argument?"

"Not that I heard. He went right down to the engine-room. If you're thinking he tipped Merrill off to any dirt about Missus Ovett—"

Koski made a brusque gesture with the flat of his hand. "I'm thinking there must have been plenty of rough stuff, no matter what you heard, or didn't hear. What else would you call cutting off a man's head? And arms? And legs? Stuffing his body in a suitcase . . .?"

Cardiff cleared his throat again, ceremoniously. "Now I suppose I ought to say I'm sorry for Ansel. But I never did like the surly son of a sea-cook. Still, that decapitation business—that's enough to turn your stomach."

"It was. Whether it was Gjersten or not. There's damn little to go on in the way of identification. How tall would you say he was?"

"Little under six feet. Well built.

Weighed maybe a hundred and seventy-five pounds, I'd guess."

"Ever see him stripped?"

Cardiff rubbed a forefinger under his nostrils. "In his undershirt. Only thing I remember is that whacky-looking tattoo mark."

"Yair . . . ?"

"A propeller. Four-bladed propeller, it was supposed to be, only it looked more like a purple four-leaf clover. Frankie kidded him about it once; Ansel got sore and near broke the Filipino's arm before I cut in."

"What was on his arm doesn't help. Recall any marks on his body?"

The Captain shook his head. "There'd have been plenty of marks on him if he got into a fight with Merrill, though."

"Tough?"

"Boss's son has a temper like a fulminate cap; runs in the family, sort of. The Old Man blows his valve if anybody looks crosseyed at him. And I've seen Merrill make a pretzel out of a pipe-stanchion when he got in a rage at *her*." Cardiff jerked his thumb toward the deck again.

"Well, hell. You'd have heard it if he and Ansel mixed it below deck, hey?"

HARD to say." The Captain was thoughtful. "Those old motors make more noise than a bombing plane. Even when they're idling, they're nothing to lull you to sleep. I didn't even hear Merrill when he came up on deck and jumped to the float."

"You see him?"

"I saw him sprawling on the float after he took a flying leap for himself."

"Where was Ansel?"

"Well, he's supposed to handle the forrad line when we dock, but he hadn't shown since he first went down below, so I figured maybe he was in the john or something. So I ran the bow-line out myself, because I could tell Mister Hurlihan was in a swivet to get on shore." Cardiff hiccupped gently. "He hopped off onto the float and beat it up the gangplank to the pier. I gave her right rudder and a touch of reverse to swing out—went up to cast off. Frankie was at the stern-line; I heard him yell. When I looked back, there was Merrill doing a broad jump clear across to the float."

"He have a suitcase with him?"

"Jumping across five feet of water? Didn't have anything except what he could carry in the pockets of his blue serge."

Koski thumbed brown flakes into the bowl of the corn cob. "Where was his wife?"

"Below. In her cabin, she says."

"Didn't you think it was queer for young Ovet to shove off like that, without saying so-long to anybody?"

"How'd I know he hadn't been talking to Missus Ovet?" The Captain puffed out his cheeks, exhaled like a balloon deflating. "I thought likely he was hot-footing after Mister Hurlihan. That was no skin off my stern."

"You see Ansel after you left the Wall Street float?"

"No. Matter of fact, now I come to think of it, I don't recall seeing him at all, after we left Rodd's. But I didn't pay any attention to that; he's been such an unreliable scut."

The radio burped, beeped, exploded into raucous voice:

" . . . Cutter Algonquin calling Coast Guard Fire Island. . . ."

" . . . go ahead, Algonquin. . . ."

" . . . bringing in twenty-two survivors torpedoed merchant vessel. Expect to disembark Freeport about three A.M. Will need four ambulances. Hospital accommodations for fifteen. That is all."

" . . . Message received, Algonquin. . . ."

The set fell silent. Koski switched it off, grimly. "You say Merrill Ovet knew how to operate one of these sets?"

"I didn't say so. But if you ask me, I'd say he does."

Koski gripped his arm. "Listen, don't play twenty questions with me. I'm after a killer. I'm after a man who may have been responsible for those fifteen people being rushed to a hospital—and for those who won't need any medical attention because they weren't picked up. You tell me what you know. Without my having to drag it out of you. And start now."

IV

"I'VE TOLD you all I know." Beads of moisture crystaled on the Captain's eyebrows. "I . . . I'm sure of that."

"I can't wait around while you cross-

question yourself. Show me young Ovet's cabin."

Cardiff led him down the companion-way, opened a stateroom door at the foot of the steps. "He wasn't on board a great deal . . . so he used this guest cabin."

Koski grunted. There wasn't much to indicate the owner's habits. Military brushes on the bureau; a copy of Hosmer's *Navigation*; some old copies of *Yachting*. On the wall a water color: the Tarpon Springs sponge fleet at anchor. In the hanging locker, a couple of suits, some crew-neck sweaters, a long-visored fishing cap, a pair of knee-high rubber boots. Automatically, Koski picked them up. One was heavier than the other. There was a red tin can about sixteen inches high in it. The tin was labeled:

One Dosen
COSTON FLARES
12 — Red — 12

He opened the can. In it were only three of the wooden sticks with the red-paper ends.

"You use flares much, on this yacht?"

Cardiff scratched his nose. "Never use any. Didn't know there were any on board."

"Mmm." Koski tucked the rubber boot under his arm. "Where's Gjersten's bunk?"

"Fo'c'sle. Up forrad." Cardiff seemed relieved. He led the way to a wedge-shaped cubicle up in the eyes of the yacht.

Koski noted the narrow pipe berth, the pint-size lavatory, the solitary porthole. The white paint of the hull planking was generously covered with tacked-up pages torn from magazines. All the illustrations were of the female form in various degrees of undress.

"Guy had a one-track mind, didn't he?" Koski opened a hanging locker, saw a worn melton jacket, white ducks, sneakers.

"Cheesecake, they call it nowadays." Cardiff grinned, weakly. "Used to have a different name for it, when I was chasing around."

"Yair." A thin packet of letters was stuck behind the thumb-screw of the porthole; the envelopes were all postmarked Waterford, New York and were addressed to *Mr. Ansel Gjersten, care Yacht Seavett,*

General Delivery, City Island, New York, N. Y. Koski took out a couple of the letters. Woman's handwriting began: "*My dear son,*" the contents were devoted to what a hard time she was having, how terrible the war was, how much she wanted to see him. "With all those pictures, there ought to be one of him around."

"Never saw one."

"What'd he look like?"

"Square face. Sort of flat. Black eyes."

"Hair?"

"Brown. Lot of it. No mustache or anything."

"Wouldn't stand out in a crowd."

Koski pulled out a drawer beneath the berth. A little stack of laundered underwear, a few pairs of woolen socks, some shirts. In another drawer, below, Koski found a cheap, shore-going suit of gray flannel, a pair of tan oxfords, a necktie and an expensive hat of dark blue velours. "You know this stuff was here, Cardiff?"

"Well, now. I didn't go over it carefully."

"You didn't have to make an inventory to dope out no yacht-hand's going to jump ship and leave all his clothes aboard."

"When I said that, I didn't know he'd been murdered." Cardiff shoved his hands deep in his coat pocket, flexed his neck muscles uneasily. "I figured it was either he'd fallen overboard or else ducked out on account of . . . expecting trouble."

Koski examined a pile of books and magazines on a bulkhead shelf. Strubel's *Internal Combustion Engines*; four old copies of *Physical Culture* with pages cut out; an ancient blue volume entitled *Hvem, Hvad, Hvor*, which seemed to be a Norwegian *Who's Who*; an advertising booklet, *Keep Your Motor Young*, put out by an oil company. Some duplicate carbons of ship-chandlers' bills made out to *L. Ovet*, *Seavett*, *Y20741*, and counter-signed *Okay to pay, C. Hurlihan*.

"This Hurlihan gent. When'd he come aboard?"

"Saturday afternoon."

"Stay Saturday night?"

"Yuh." Cardiff coughed behind his hand. "All according to Emily Post. He had the guest cabin."

"Merrill's cabin?"

"That's right."

"Then he must have had a suitcase."

"And a brief case."

"Take it with him when he left?"

"Absolutely. Carried it himself. Frankie was going to carry it up the dock at Wall Street for him, but Mr. Hurlihan told him not to bother."

"Notice what kind of a suitcase it was?"

Koski's glance traveled across colored cartoons of wenches wearing little more than seductive smiles, to a double-page spread from *Life* displaying a rear view of the legs and buttocks of a row of damsels entered in some beauty contest and bearing labels telling which city they represented.

"Tan leather, as I remember. To match the brief case."

"NOT THE same one the body was in, then." The double page was fastened above Ansel's berth with red thumbtacks; the tack at the lower left-hand corner had been pulled out and replaced many times, according to the numerous punctures in the paper. Koski wondered why,—pulled the tack out. A snapshot which had been hidden behind the magazine page slipped down to the blanket on the berth.

"Mmmmm!" Cardiff's exclamation had an up-and-down inflection.

Koski picked the photograph up. It was a nude girl stretched out on her stomach, head turned to one side and pillowed on her forearms. A striped bath towel was laid across her backside, but no attempt had been made to conceal her face. She was lying on a lounging pillow; a couple of deck cleats showed at one edge of the print.

"Who's she, Cardiff?"

Cardiff inclined his head aft.

"Yair? She pass these around to the crew?"

"Not to me, anyway. I never saw it. Must have been taken last summer, sometime."

"Was Ansel around then?"

"No. Hired him at the end of last season. He couldn't have taken that."

"You don't think her husband gave it to him, do you?" Koski slipped the print in his pocket, pulled a pillow off the berth. There was no laundry mark on the slip unless it had been made with the invisible ink some laundries use for identification. "Ship's wash done on board?"

"No. We send it ashore."

"Where to?"

Cardiff scratched his ear, looked puzzled. "Now I ought to be able to tell you. But I can't. Frankie takes care of the bedmaking."

"Let's see Frankie."

Cardiff led the way aft through a steel door in the watertight bulkhead. To starboard were more crew quarters; to port, a galley gleaming with copper and monel. The Filipino, in a starched jacket and white monkey-cap, was slicing bread. A jar of anchovy paste stood open beside a yellow bar of butter.

The Captain put his head in the galley door, jerked a thumb at Koski. "Gentleman's from the Police Department. Inquiring about Ansel."

Frankie poised the knife, regarded the two men with alert black eyes. His skin was the color of lubricating oil; there was a suggestion of oil about the black-enamel hair.

"Inquiring about last Sunday dinner, right now. What'd you feed the folks for the big meal?" Koski gauged the steward to be about twenty-one.

"Roast lamb, baked sweets, lima beans, pear salad, chocolate pudding." The steward cut halfway through a slice of bread, stopped. "There was nothing wrong with the food!"

"Tchah, tchah. Didn't claim there was. Everybody eat hearty?"

Cardiff said: "Ansel didn't. Least not on board. He had leave to go ashore Sunday until four."

"Oh." Koski waved casually. "Think nothing more of it, Frankie. Tell me, where you have your boat laundry done?"

"Pelham Shore Hand Laundry." There was no expression on the Filipino's face. "Four twenty-nine City Island Avenue."

Koski made a notation in his leather book. "You make up the bunks today?"

"Yes, sir."

"All the sheets and pillowslips present and accounted for?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't check all the berths, though? Only those that'd been used this week?"

Frankie laid down the knife. "None of the berths are made up, except those that are in use."

"Anything gone from the linen chest?"

"No." The jet eyes slitted. "Are you claiming I had anything to do with . . . whatever happened to Ansel?"

Koski rubbed his chin, reflectively. "What makes you think something happened to him?"

"She said so." The steward's lips compressed as if he had said more than he meant to.

"Yair? You didn't know anything about it before that." Koski made it as a statement.

"No, sir."

"Where's Mrs. Ovett, now?"

"In her cabin, sir."

"Which one is that?"

Cardiff edged past. "Double stateroom there. At the stern. I'll show you."

"Never mind." Koski moved through a carpeted saloon with knotty-pine paneling, hunting prints over a fireplace mantel, red leather club chairs. Before he knocked at the door of the aft cabin he glanced over his shoulder.

Cardiff was standing at the foot of the main companionway; he started up the steps hastily.

The Captain looked worried.

V

A THROATY "Come in" answered his knock. Barbara Ovett was propped up against a mound of satin pillows on a wide, double bed. Koski eyed the curves which made her Nile green sweater and black slacks seem just a little too tight.

"From the Police Department, Mrs. Ovett."

"Oh, ye-e-es . . ." She lifted one hand, languidly brushed a spun-copper bang off her forehead. "Looking for Ansel, aren't you?" She waved vaguely at a tiny boudoir chair.

He sat down, surveyed the gold-backed toilet set on the dresser; the mandarin gown with its cabalistic embroidery in gold. "Steward says you think something happened to him."

"Something horrible." She smiled sadly, half-closed her eyes as if she addressed a stupid child. "I knew it would."

"How'd you know?" He put the rubber boot down.

Barbara opened her eyes wide in evident astonishment. "Why, the Fish told me. You know the Fish, of course?"

"The Fish. Yair."

"Ansel's birthday was the seventh of March." She stroked her hair with a movement like a caress. "This is the nineteenth. Born under the sign of the Fish, with Neptune retrograding,—threatening the most dangerous vibrations,—with a tendency to terminate in a fatal accident . . ."

Koski pulled down the corners of his mouth, nodded. "There was a fatality, all right. Wouldn't come under the head of an accident. Do your astrology books give any dope on what Ansel might have run into,—or who?"

She frowned daintily but there was no impatience in her voice. "The truth doesn't really come from the books, Mister—?"

"Koski. Lieutenant Koski."

"—it comes from the stars."

"Okay. The stars have any data?"

"There are always indications. Only people don't always interpret them properly. I did my best to warn Ansel. Every astro-physicist is aware that Neptune in an air sign has evil potentialities for those whose natal charts—"

"Yair, yair." Koski sucked in his cheeks, pursed his lips. "Let's skip the air signs and get down to earth. Any practical reason you know of for anyone to kill him?"

She opened her mouth to say something, changed her mind, shook her head instead.

"Or hack him to pieces? Or chuck his body in the tideway?"

She put her hand to her throat,—bent her head back, stared at him under lowered lids. "If that's what happened, I'm not astonished. He never would pay any attention to the planetary influences that were so *plain*—"

"Pull over." He held up a palm. "They don't include a study of the stars at the Police Academy. So if it's all the same with you, let's skip the abracadabra."

She pouted like a schoolgirl; there was a juvenile innocence in her wide-set green eyes. "But I was only trying to help you. You want to know what happened to Ansel, don't you?"

"I've a good idea what happened to Ansel. Right now I'd like to know a little

something about your husband. For instance, he hasn't been on board for quite a while,—until yesterday,—has he?"

SHE BENT over to take a cigarette from a jade box. "Said the little black hen to the big red rooster, you ain't been around, sir, as often as you useter."

"Where has he been?"

"Where hasn't he?" She let him strike a match, smiled intimately into his eyes when she leaned toward him. "Merrill has a crazy notion he ought to learn his father's business from the sea up. So he's tried it all. Longshoring, stoker, able-bodied sailor. Says he intends to learn all about going down to the sea in ships so some day he won't be having to give orders he doesn't know anything about. Carrying romance-of-the-sea a bit far, don't you think?"

"Nothing very romantic about it these days, Mrs. Overt. How long's he been away this last time?"

"Seven weeks."

"Mean to say he came home after two months' absence,—and didn't stay overnight? A fine thing!"

She pulled the sweater down tightly over her breasts, sighed. "The *Seavett* isn't exactly Home Sweet Home to Merrill."

"You live in town?"

"We have an apartment on Riverside Drive. We don't use it a whole lot. You've heard of people being married—and not working at it."

"Happens. One of those things?"

She lifted one shoulder, curled up a corner of her lips. "He's so ridiculously jealous. He's known Clem Hurlihan for years;—he's perfectly aware I consult Clem about investments now and then. Yet when he came aboard yesterday and found Clem here, he got the sulks. Wouldn't even talk to me." She wriggled down on the pillows; rolled over on her side so she faced him. "I don't have to tell you it was strictly for business reasons."

"No. You don't have to tell me that." He began to sweat a little; it was close and hot in the stateroom. "You might tell me where your husband would have gone, if he wanted to find Hurlihan. After the superintendent had gone ashore."

"Clem lives at the Sulgrave Hotel."

He wrote it down. "Your husband didn't actually have anything on you and Hurlihan?"

"Don't be silly." She kicked off one sandal. "Merrill might have wanted to get something on me, as you put it. That may have been why he was going after Ansel, hammer and tongs."

"He was, hah?"

"I heard them wrangling down in the engine-room the minute Ansel came aboard. I couldn't hear what they were saying, of course. But it would be just like Merrill to try and make Ansel admit that Clem and I . . . you know." She put on a shy frown of embarrassment.

"Yair. There wouldn't have been any reason for your husband being jealous of Ansel?"

"You must think I'm terribly bad!"

He took out the photograph, held it out on the flat of his hand.

"That?" She giggled, half-closed her eyes. "If that's what's bothering you! Clem took it. As a joke, of course. One day last summer when I didn't know he'd come aboard."

"I found it in Ansel's cabin."

"You *did*!" Color flooded up into her face. "You can't imagine I knew he had it . . ."

"I had my imagination cut out years ago. What I want to know is where he got this. And if your husband knew he had it."

"He might have taken it out of the stateroom Clem stayed in." She watched his eyes to see whether he believed her. "One thing sure. He didn't get it from Merrill. Merrill never saw it." Her hand grabbed at the snapshot.

KOSKI held it out, away from her. A hand came from behind him, over his shoulder, snatched the print. He pushed his feet against the edge of the bed, tilted the chair back, wrenched around, got a grip on a starched white coattail.

A metal tray smashed down on his head, scalding fluid splashed across his face, crockery toppled into his lap. He hauled on the coat; fabric ripped. The Filipino came back to him, flailing wildly and clawing at his eyes.

Koski drove a short-arm jolt to the steward's belt buckle. Frankie went to his

knees, spitting in the Lieutenant's face.

Barbara cried "Stop it" but made no attempt to interfere.

Koski's left hand bunched the cloth of the Filipino's coat just below the collar, yanked the steward toward him; his right, with the wrist and forearm rigid, drove in and up at the other's chin.

Frankie fell down on his face, among smashed cups and plates. He stayed down, but one fist came up in a slashing arc. There was a jagged shard of tumbler in it. Koski kicked at the black hair. The Filipino jerked his head back. The toe of the shoe clipped him under the jaw, hard. He went over on his side, still jabbing ineffectually with the sliver of glass.

Koski stood up, shifted his weight stamped on Frankie's wrist. "Cut it out now. Or I'll part your hair down to the bone." He pried the weapon out of the numb fingers, threw it behind him. Then he wound his fingers in the back of the Filipino's collar, yanked him erect. "What makes with the berserk business?"

The steward showed his upper teeth. "You have no right to that photograph!"

"No? Maybe you have a better one?"

The Filipino brought his knee up viciously, caught Koski in the groin. The pain doubled him up, but as he bent over, his left hand shot out, got a grip on Frankie's throat. The steward squirmed, bowed his head, sank his teeth into the detective's thumb. Koski smashed a hard right just back of the boy's ear; his knees sagged; it took only a push to send him to the floor in a heap.

The Lieutenant straightened up, grimacing. He wiped a little blood from his thumb. "Have to take an anti-rabies shot for this."

"He *did* act like a mad dog, didn't he?" Barbara's eyes were bright with excitement. "But Frankie simply misunderstood, Lieutenant."

"You think so?" He prodded the Filipino with his foot. "You want another helping?"

Frankie lay still, wrapping a handkerchief around his hand where the glass had cut him.

"Get up." Koski wound his fingers in the black hair, brought the steward to his feet, moaning. "If I didn't have more

urgent business on hand, I'd take you back downtown with me and run you through the wringer. If you start anything again, I'll do it."

"Oh, but Lieutenant." Barbara pouted. "He didn't really attack you. He thought you were trying to take something that belonged to me. You didn't see what it was, did you, Frankie?"

The steward looked sullenly at the floor. "No, ma'am."

"You can't blame him for defending his employer's interest, can you?" She wagged her fingers at the mess on the carpet. "Just see what you've done to my cabin."

Koski released the steward, shoved him toward the door. "Better get that hand fixed up. You can come back and clean this up later." He picked up the trampled snapshot.

Barbara held out a hand. "You *hurt* yourself, Frankie. Let me see."

The Filipino put the hand with the stained handkerchief behind him. "It's just a little cut, ma'am. I'm sorry I ruined your tray. I'll make some more sandwiches. Excuse me, please." He stalked away.

"I had no idea," Barbara propped herself up on one elbow, "he would tear into you like that. But there's no sense apologizing for loyalty, is there?"

"Not so far as I'm concerned." Koski wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "But if he gets sudden spells of misunderstanding,—"

"You think he might have done away with Ansel?" She seemed to be debating the matter with herself. "Oh, Frankie was too scared of Gjersten. No," she retrieved the chart of the zodiac which had slid to the floor, "all the signs seem to point . . . in another direction—"

"Here we go again. By any chance, do these celestial signboards say where your husband has gone?"

"I don't need any planetary progression to know where Merrell will be."

"Give."

"With Ellen."

"Keep pouring."

"Ellen Wyatt. The sculptress. She has a studio on South Street somewhere. Merrell's supposed to be posing. For a life-size figure. That'll be his bedtime story."

KOSKI GRUNTED. "How you and your husband handle your private affairs is nothing in my life. I'm after a killer who might not stop with one murder. Take a tip from me. Don't depend on the constellations to keep *you* out of trouble."

He retrieved the boot, went out, up the companionway. She followed him to the deckhouse.

"If I *could* help you by working out Ansel's horoscope . . .?"

"You can use voodoo, if it'll dig up any real dope. But don't expect me to go into a trance over any of your starfish."

She disappeared below deck.

Cardiff was backed up against the chart-case. An empty glass and a bottle of Demerara rum, nearly empty, were within easy reach. "Get what you wanted, Lieutenant?"

"Nothing but a runaround. Except from that Filipino cookie. He blew his top. I had to muss him up a little."

"Was that it? He came up here to get me to stick some adhesive on his hand. I *thought* I heard a fracas."

"You haven't heard the last of it. Quote you odds on that. When you go on patrol again?"

"Tomorrow night. We have the twelve-to-eight. Stratford Light to Penfield Reef. Why?"

"Because I want you people where I can get my hands on you. Nobody on this tub has a clean bill of health as yet. We might have to make a few bloodtests before we get through. I want all of you here. When I get back. *All* of you. Understand?" He went aft, hauled in the *Vigilant's* bow-line, cast her off, jumped aboard.

Mulcahey was nursing an aluminum pot over a canned-alcohol flame. "A poor substitute for what you prob'ly been guzzling up on the palatial pleasure-craft. Would you turn up your nose at mere caffeine, after bein' offered the best the house affords?"

"Had all the stimulation I can stand, Irish. Kick her over."

"Speaking of stimulation," the Sergeant blew the flame out, "if that damsel you were interviewin' was a sample of the upper crust, I could go for a moderate morsel of such."

"You wouldn't care for it. Too hot for your taste."

"You underestimate me, Steven. I would not even require the customary book of verse. No, nor a jug of anything;—not with her beside me, now."

"Mrs. Ovett has plenty of the old McGoo. More than she knows how to handle."

"She got a rise out of you. Ha!" Mulcahey thumbed the starter-button.

"She'd get a rise out of a mummy. But she's strictly a ga-ga. Kept double-talking me about foretelling this hatchet-work from the constellations. Wanted me to wait while she doped out who did it,—from a chart of the celestial cycles."

"Hell, plenty of right people believe in astronomy. I got a cousin over in Hackensack who cleans up on the parimutuels by consulting one of them birthday books. He looks up every nag's birthday before he will lay a buck on the line."

"I must get him to pick me a winner for the Derby sometime. But that isn't all that's whacky with the Ovett babe. She's a witch."

"Now, now." Mulcahey poured coffee into a thick mug. "Is that a thing to say on short acquaintance?"

"I should have sent you on board to make inquiries."

"Foo." The Sergeant blew on the coffee. "When better dames are made, Mulcahey will make them."

"You'd have little or no trouble with this one."

"Man-goofey?"

"Way I read it, she's been steaming up to every male on the *Seavett*. Except the Cap, maybe. He's over the age limit."

The Sergeant peered at him across the top of the mug. "And her married to Ovett?"

"Young Merrell Ovett. He's the guy absence didn't make her fonder of. Just got back to the yacht last night after two months away. Stayed a few minutes, took it on the lam again."

"When the cat's away, the mice will play around. You tie this marital laxness to the human remnants in that suitcase?"

Koski stoked his pipe. "That's the sixty-four-dollar question. I pass. Get going, will you? I have to make a hurry call."

"The last one on the day's schedule, I trust."

"Never can tell . . . with a dame."

"How do you care for that!" The Irishman bobbed his head in resentment. "*You* got to see a dame! What about the cute little canary who's been eating her heart out all evenin' long because I ain't showed!"

"This is business, Sarge. You know what business comes before."

VI

THE luminous dial of the clock on the *Vigilant's* instrument board said ten forty-five when Koski stepped ashore at the Battery Basin. It took him five minutes on the phone to the Oak Street station to locate the address of *Wyatt, Ellen, artist*,—because she wasn't listed in the phone book; another five to drive the green-and-white coupé of the Harbor Precinct to 88B South Street.

88B didn't look like a residence to Koski. It was a battered two-story frame structure; it had seen better days and many of them. The ground floor was occupied by *H. Bloomfield, Ironmonger and Ships Chandler*; a sign across the second floor proclaimed:

DAVID ANGEL, *Sails, Awnings
& Boat Covers of All Kinds.*

The cans of paint and putty, the hardware and ships' lanterns in the ground-floor windows said that the chandler was still in business. But a sail-loft might be big enough for a sculptress's studio . . .

A flight of unsteady stairs climbed up at one side of the building; the door at its foot was unlocked. He went up. Somewhere above he heard music.—violins singing a melody he remembered but couldn't recognize.

There was another door at the top of the stairs. He pushed it open, found himself in a great barren room, with piles of baled rope and long spars laid up on wooden horses. Dozens of ships' blocks hung from hooks along one wall. A row of naked bulbs in a metal trough suspended from the ceiling threw a fierce illumination on the far end of the loft vault. There was no canvas; no sailmaker's table;—only a scattering of wood and metal frames built up on boxlike pedestals, a few piles of

fat sacks. A brick fireplace had been built against one wall; its hearth had been bricked-in, too, save for a small iron oven door halfway up the arch. An old pot-bellied stove with an isinglass front spilled wine-stained light over a cot, a chest of drawers, a plank table laid on wooden horses. The music came from a portable phonograph on the table. Stuck up on a round wooden platform a couple of feet from the floor, was a shapeless blob of clay that reminded Koski unpleasantly of the thing in the suitcase.

A girl in a smock and a red bandanna bount around her head stooped beside the pedestal. She seemed to be stirring with an iron slice-bar at an enormous mud pie on the floor.

Koski got halfway across the loft before she heard him, turned.

He touched the rim of his hat. "Miss Wyatt?"

She laughed, held up arms sticky to the elbows with clay. She had the light at her back; he couldn't see her clearly. "I didn't hear you on account of *Peer Gynt*." She picked her way through a group of plaster busts to the phonograph, lifted the needle. "I'm sorry."

Koski noticed that the portrait busts were all longshore types. "You'd have trouble hearing an air-raid siren, wouldn't you?" He surveyed the windows that gave out onto the river; they were covered with old army blankets. "Merrill Ovet around?"

She went back to the clay, resumed her stirring. "He isn't here. Are you a friend of Merrill's?"

"I'M A COP. Koski. Lieutenant." He sauntered over beside a lumpy figure shrouded with muslin; he could see her better, now. A small, oval face with too wide a mouth, too long a nose to be beautiful; a boyish figure in short skirts that showed trim legs, neat ankles. "I was told young Ovet might be here."

"I have to keep working this clay now it's started or I'll lose the whole batch." She eyed him steadily. "Barbara told you he'd be here. She thinks Merrill's in love with me."

"That's right." Koski decided she was on guard but not particularly alarmed. "Has he been here?"

"Not for a fortnight or so."

"Haven't seen him for a couple weeks." He repeated it as if to remember what she had said. "He wasn't around last night, then?"

"No." She laid the slice-bar down carefully. "Are you looking for him on Barbara's account?"

"I'm from the Marine Division, Miss Wyatt." He admired a bronze bas-relief of dorymen hauling in a loaded trawl. "We're busy enough these days. Without monkeying around keyholing. That's for punks in the private agencies."

"Then it's something serious?" She picked up a handful of the wet clay, squeezed it through strong fingers to test its consistency.

"It's serious. I haven't got a warrant in my pocket. Hasn't been a presentment to the Grand Jury yet. Ovet's only wanted for questioning, at this stage." He dug at the bowl of his pipe with a jack-knife. "Been a man killed."

"Who was he?" She pressed a spatula against the shapeless mass on the revolving platform.

"Hasn't been identified, positively. But there's an engineer missing from the *Seavett*. Name of Ansel Gjersten."

The sculptress's fingers swiftly molded the contour of a man's shoulder. "I never heard of Gjersten. Are you trying to suggest Merrill murdered him, Lieutenant?"

"Trying to find out what happened on the yacht yesterday evening, when young Ovet came aboard. Nobody's seen Gjersten since Ovet left. Some reason to think there might have been a quarrel. Part of a body was recovered from the East River tonight. Not enough to specify in the indictment. I'm the Inquiring Reporter, asking what it's all about."

Her hands shaped in the corded neck ligaments and straining pectoral muscles of a seaman pulling at a hawser. "I don't believe it."

"What? That Gjersten was corpsed?"

"That Merrill was mixed up in any murder." She regarded him solemnly.

"That's natural. He's your friend."

"He is. Not in the way you probably mean, though. But it's more than that." She kneaded clay off her fingers. "If he'd done . . . anything like that . . . he'd have realized the police must come here to the

studio; Barbara would make sure of that. So *he wouldn't* be coming here, would he?"

"What makes you think he is?" Koski rubbed his hand over the rough wood of a ship's figurehead that was propped up against a pile of clay-sacks. "You hear from him?"

From beneath a cup and saucer on the table, she took a yellow telegraph form, held it out to him.

He read the pasted-on capitals:

STILL TRYING TO CARRY THE
MESSAGE TO GARCIA STOP SEE
YOU TOMORROW BEFORE I TAKE
OFF AGAIN

SINBAD

The wire had been sent from the Fulton Street office of Western Union at 8:00 P.M. Monday, less than three hours before. Koski pointed his pipe-stem at the signature. "Private term of endearment?"

"Oh, no. Oblique sense of humor. He always signs letters to friends that way."

"This doesn't sound like a sailor. More like a code."

"The message to Garcia part?" Ellen went back to the clay figure, picked up a spatula, began to smooth the throat. "That's just his way of saying he intends to go through with what he started, even though this last attempt failed."

"Um. What'd he fail at?"

"Going through with a convoy, I suppose. War supplies for Murmansk. That's where he expected to go when he left,—but he couldn't have made it over and back on a freighter in this time. I expect the convoy was sent somewhere else after it reached the assembly port,—and now he's going to start all over again."

"Happens once in a while. What was his ship?"

"He didn't tell me; he wasn't supposed to talk about it." She bent her head, lifted one arm to brush a spattering of gray from her cheek. "Do you think a man who went to sea over the bitter objections of his family—because he thinks it is the one thing he can do best in the war—is the sort who'd be a murderer?"

Koski blew smoke at a stone statuette of a hip-booted clam-digger. "Maybe some of these psychiatric sharps could tell you who's likely to be a killer. I can't. Plenty

of people who wind up behind a homicide eight-ball couldn't be classed as criminals,—until after the fact."

"I understand that." Her face was impassive; only the speed with which her fingers patted the clay into shape showed the tension she was under. "If a man got angry suddenly—"

He shook his head, briefly. "This wasn't one of those. Guy hotheaded enough to commit manslaughter offhand wouldn't go to the trouble of dismembering his victim afterwards."

Ellen laid the spatula carefully on an up-ended orange crate. "That's what I meant. Merrill couldn't have done that." She indicated the row of portrait busts. "It's my business to know something about men,—what sort of human beings they are, underneath their habits, their prejudices, the masks they wear in front of people. Without that, it's no good starting a sitting."

He waited, worrying the pipe-stem between his teeth.

"I *know* Merrill. He could no more do a horrible thing like that than be one of Hitler's storm-troopers." She flipped the muslin drape back off the life-size figure. "See for yourself."

The statue was that of a sailor on lookout, one hand gripping the ship's bulwark, the other shading his eyes. He wore cloth cap and pea-jacket; leaned into the wind, chin outthrust. It was a strong, hard, youthful face with boldness and perhaps a little bitterness stamped into the firm mouth and prominent nose.

Koski had known plenty of seamen like that; this had the flavor of salt spray in a force five breeze. "You're good, Miss Wyatt."

"If this is good, it's because I've caught Merrill as he is. Perhaps not as some people know him, but the sort of individual that's actually there."

"Is it life-size?"

She held up a pair of huge calipers. "Every measurement is exact. It's the only way I can work."

"Probably a swell likeness. But I can't carry it around in my pocket."

She didn't understand.

"You may be right about his not having anything to do with this dead man. But I have to make sure; I have to put him

through a true-or-false. He might show up here, as per telegram,—but I can't depend on that. So I have to send out an alarm. With a description. I doubt if the Commissioner would stand for the expense of running off a few hundred copies of your statue."

"Oh, I see." Ellen hesitated a moment, went behind the table, to a trunk. "Here are some stills from a sixteen-millimeter film a friend of ours took." She handed over a half-dozen glossy miniatures. "Posture studies. Some of them don't show his face."

"These ought to do it. I won't tell him I got them."

She smiled. "I will. I'm not afraid he's done anything so very wrong. So I don't mind helping you to find him. But I expect he'll be here before you can get those reproduced . . ." Ellen stopped, listening to heavy footsteps coming up the stairs.

Koski wandered casually toward the door.

It banged back on its hinges. A blocky-shouldered man strode in, stopped short at sight of the detective.

KOSKI had the feeling he'd seen this man before; then he realized it had been in plaster; one of the portrait busts there on the floor had this same short-necked build,—compact as a truck motor. His leather jacket and deep-sea cap spotted him as a waterfront worker. He took off the cap; the strong light showed features reddened to the dull shade of old brick; a jagged purplish scar zigzagged down from one corner of his mouth across the jutting chin.

"Hi, Ellen."

"Hello, Tim."

"Am I comrade Buttinsky?"

"Not at all." She gestured toward Koski. "A plainclothesman, inquiring about Merrill."

Tim said "Oh" and "You came to the wrong place, cop."

"Yair?"

"Yeah. We know from nothing about Señor Ovett."

Ellen cut in quickly. "I do, Tim." She fluttered the telegram. "Had a wire from him."

The man bent his head as if he hadn't

heard correctly. "You did?"

"Isn't it . . . odd?"

Koski said: "What's odd about it?"

Tim took the telegram. "One thing . . . I didn't know he was where he could send a wire."

"Another thing," Ellen put her hand on Tim's sleeve. "Merrill knows how I feel about Tim. He must have something pretty . . . important . . . to say to me."

Koski said: "Might be something about the killing"

"What killing?" Tim's tone was hostile.

"Body was hauled up out of the East River tonight. Engineer on Ovett's yacht is missing. I'm trying to add this and that together."

Tim shrugged, disinterested. "You won't get the right score if you add Merrill into a murder case. Did you try him at home?"

"His wife says he doesn't use the Riverside Drive place much; the phone doesn't answer, there."

Tim made a slashing movement with the edge of his palm. "His father's home. Harbor House. Up in the fancy Fifties. Merrill usually goes there sometime or other when he's in town."

"Thanks." Koski drifted toward the door. "Don't be surprised if there's a couple of loungers hanging around your front door for a while, Miss Wyatt."

"Detectives?" She laughed. "It'll be the first time I've had any police protection since I've been on the waterfront."

Tim spoke up. "Tell your sherlocks they better not try to strong-arm Merrill. He's a mean customer in a rough and tumble."

"I'll bear it in mind." Koski went down to the street, stood for a moment gazing out over the line of barges nestling between the piers. On one of those dark hulks the Gurlid kids would be asleep, now . . .

He climbed back of the coupé's wheel, made time over the cobbles toward the Battery.

VII

IT WAS eleven o'clock when Koski made his way through the tunneled driveway that pierces the old Dock Department building at Pier A, jerked open the little green door marked *Detectives*,

Harbor Precinct. In the bunk room, a lanky plainclothesman lay stretched out on a cot, reading a Racing Form. He waved the paper.

"Hi-yo, Silver. Identification calls you, few minutes ago."

"What about, Johnny?"

"They been doing some leg-work for you."

"Makes it even. You're doing some, too. Gallop these pix up to Centre Street. For a rush flyer."

"You think I'm kidding?" Johnny O'Malley got up, unwillingly. "I'm not kidding. They found a leg for you."

"Goody."

"Or rather one of the Army Em-Pees on Governors Island finds it. He sees a bare tootsie sticking out of the water, figures it's some A.W.O.L. who tries to swim back after the last ferry. Turns out it's a solo limb with no body attached. So prob'ly it belongs to that tasty little tidbit you found in the river."

KOSKI grabbed the phone on his desk. "Climb in your cockpit, Johnny. That's *really* a rush, now."

He called the Bureau of Identification, learned the recovered fragment wasn't going to help a great deal. Gulls had stripped most of the flesh off the bones . . .

He talked to the headquarter's dispatcher, put in an all-borough alarm for Merrill Ovett: *six feet one, two hundred pounds, muscular, aged 29, fair, freckled, prominent nose, square chin, pear-shaped ears close to head, high straight forehead, educated, sailor, last seen wearing cloth cap, blue serge suit*.

He got through to Homicide, suggested covering the Riverside Drive apartment, the Wyatt studio, the Sulgrave. "You can get a description of Hurlihan at the hotel. Might check on the bird who sent a wire to the Wyatt wren about eight tonight from Fulton Street Western; signed himself Sinbad. And listen. This thing has a slightly Nazi smell to it. Bear down,—but sudden."

He left word where he could be reached, went out, flagged a taxi.

"Harbor House. Sutton Place. At Fifty-fourth. Forget there's a rubber shortage, will you?"

Lawford Ovett lived in a penthouse;

neither the major-general at the street door or the head-usher in the elevator could, or would, tell if he was in.

The maid who answered the doorbell wasn't much better; she said she would see if Mister Oveti was in and what was the Lieutenant's business, *s'il vous plait*.

"Official," Koski said. "And I'm in a hurry."

From windows opening out on a terrace, he looked down on the dark avenue of the East River. A railroad car-float was being herded toward Hell Gate by a sheep-dog of a tug; a deep-laden fish-boat bucked the ebb toward Fulton Market; a ferry swam over to Welfare Island, throwing a brassy radiance on the water.

Faint yellow beads moved across the black lacework of the Queensboro Bridge;—men and women returning to Long Island City, Jamaica, Flushing, Richmond Hill, Jackson Heights. There would be men there who had a stake in the hand Koski was playing. Men who had been working overtime making shells that would be going over in one of the convoys in a few days; men taking their girls home after one last night before they shipped out on a tanker; men reporting to the Coast Guard for the early morning offshore patrol; men with brothers or cousins or sons in the fighting ships that shepherded the convoys to the other side.

A door closed down the corridor; a middle-aged Santa Claus emerged briskly. His chipped-beef skin had a freshly scrubbed look against the white hair; deep crinkles were etched around the corners of eyes blue and shiny as agates. His nose was short; it spread flatly at the nostrils.

"Lieutenant?" The voice had the soft Scandinavian accent. "*Vaer so göd.*" He held out his hand toward an armchair.

"Came about your son, Mister Oveti."

"I am not Merrill's father. Lawford's in there." He moved his head an inch to one side. "I'll take care of anything you want. I'm Rolf Berger. His executive director."

"This is a person-to-person call."

"You can't see Lawford."

"You think I can't?"

"He's asleep."

"Wake him up." Koski scowled. "I told the maid this was urgent."

Berger rotated his head slowly from left to right, back again. "It's impossible. Better let me help you. Lawford's under doctor's orders."

The man from the Harbor Squad planted his fists on his hips. "He'll be under police orders, if you keep horsing around." He stalked toward the hallway.

Berger held out an arm, barred the way. "Looking for trouble, aren't you? I've dealt with your kind before. Get out. Stay out until you have a proper warrant."

Koski reached inside his coat; brought out his service-special, hefted it on his palm. "I'm after a criminal. You may be aiding him to escape. In such cases, there's a little thing called the privilege of hot pursuit. It makes this," he dangled the gun loosely in front of him, "a damned good warrant." He pushed past the other, flung open the door.

THE ROOM was small and narrow, paneled in white painted tongue-and-groove. The floor was bare save for a couple of rag rugs. There was no furniture except one sagging wicker chair. Across one end of the room a ship's-berth had been built in between two plain-front lockers. Opposite it was a hanging locker, a mahogany dresser-cupboard, a white commode. On the commode, in place of jug and basin, was a huge bust of marble.

Overhead a varnished hatch was partly open to the night sky; the faint light which came through its ground glass was the only illumination in the room. An aneroid barometer in a brass case hung between a couple of framed photographs of old ships. Koski thought it likely this cabin had been transferred board-by-board to the penthouse and set up there in memory of long years on blue water. He went over to the berth.

The head on the white pillow looked, in the vague illumination from the hatch, like Salome's offering on the silver platter.

The man was asleep. His cavernous face was lead-gray; deep shadows emphasized the gauntness of the eye sockets; slate-blue lips gaped open under the long hooked nose.

Koski put the gun away. "Good evening!"

The head remained motionless.

"Looks like a dying man."

"He's a broken man." Berger glowered. "He's been a sick man for a couple of years. Ever since his son began the farce of working his way up a ladder he never had to climb at all. Lawford's been badgered about enough, sir,—and if you've any expectation of rousing him out of his sleep tonight, I'll stop you if it's the last thing I do."

"You won't stop me doing anything I have to do." Koski was brusque. "You a friend of the family? Or just a business acquaintance?"

"When you've stayed in business with a man for thirty years, you're his friend." Berger bit off the end of a panetela, stuck it in his mouth, unlighted, at a defiant angle.

"Okay. One of the Ovetts seems to be in a jam." Koski glanced curiously at the tell-tale compass inverted in the ceiling over the berth. "You want to be a help, you can tell me what I need to know. If you don't, I'll have to ring in the higher-ups. The old gentleman might not care for that."

"We've had enough trouble from stupid officials. More than enough. Telling us what we can ship, where to take it, how much to charge for it. Fixing it so the damned union howlers can give us orders as to who we have to hire, how much to pay them, what kind of cheese our men have to have with what kind of pie. Good Heavens, if we have much more of it, Lawford'll be in his grave. So if I can save him any of it . . ."

Koski examined the bust on the commode; it was a badly chipped head of Kaiser Wilhelm. Part of the nose had been broken off. One of the mustaches was gone. An ear was missing. Around the base were the marks of chisels spelling out words which at first he thought were *Hoch der Kaiser* . . .

"What the hell goes on here?" he inquired. "A little pro-Germanism?"

"Not at all." Berger snapped. "That's a relic of the old *Vaterland*, later the *Leviathan*. Used as a transport during the last war. The statue was mounted at the head of the swimming pool. The troops marked it up, naturally. After the war, when we took over the ship. Lawford thought it would be amusing to have it here in his cabin. It's not exactly the sort of thing a

German would be proud of, in its present shape."

"Never was, was it?" Koski went back into the living room.

"You wanted some information about Merrill?" Berger tongued the cigar around in his mouth.

"Want to know where he is."

"I couldn't tell you. Doubt if Lawford has any idea, either. He and the boy don't jibe very well. But if there's any trouble I can straighten out . . ." Berger spread his palms. "I've come to Merrill's rescue once or twice before so Lawford wouldn't have to know about it."

"He'll take some rescuing this time. It's murder."

TWO VERTICAL creases formed between Berger's eyebrows. He chewed on the cigar, morosely. "I don't like the sound of that."

"You wouldn't like the sight of it, either. The murderee was hacked into hunks. We haven't found all of him, yet."

"Someone Merrill had a fight with?" The Executive Director clasped his hands behind his neck, began to pace up and down.

"All we know for sure is there *was* a murder. An engineer from the Ovet yacht is missing. Ansel Gjersten, his name is. And young Ovet's done a disappearing act. That's enough to make an arrest."

"You must be mistaken. I don't believe Merrill would run away from trouble if it came looking for him. But I'm certain he'd not run away after there *was* trouble."

"You wouldn't be holding out on me?"

"Certainly not."

"It'd be very nokay. Because we'll catch up with him, sooner or later. Sooner the better for all concerned. If you hear from him,—or can get word to him,—smart thing for him to do is walk to the nearest station and give himself up."

"If he's killed a man in self defense, he'd have given himself up, already. If he killed this engineer for any other reason, Merrill's probably shipped out of the country by now."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that—"

The maid came in with a white-enameled hand-set. "Call for you, sir." She

plugged it in a wall receptacle, handed the instrument to Koski, departed.

It was Nixon. "On that comparative weight thing . . ."

"What you make it?"

"Taking the leg into consideration, we arrive at an estimate of a hundred and sixty-seven pounds, five ten and a half."

Koski thought about that. "It's not too far from our tentative identification. Ansel Gjersten, engineer, yacht *Seavett*. Came through Miss Persons."

"Be nice if those lugs in there would let me know before I run myself ragged."

"Keep running. Plenty more ground to cover."

"We covered some of it. Fingered your laundryman for you."

"Now you're pitching. Whatsit?"

"Three verticals and a cross-bar stand for initials H.H. together."

"Reasonable."

"H.H. stands for Hong Hop."

"Where's he push his flatiron?"

"1143 Lowden. Know where that is?"

"Brooklyn somewhere. Red Hook."

"Reddest part. Heart of the Jungle. Three blocks below the Erie Basin."

"Sounds like stuff. Heathen Chinese have any record?"

"Clean as a whistle. You going to check on him?"

"Always run 'em out, is my motto. Even if they're scratch bunts. I'll be over there before he gets another shirt ironed."

He was jabbing at the elevator button before he called "So-long" to Berger.

VIII

THE VIGILANT furrowed the oily blackness of the Gowanus Canal like a plow in soft mud. The funnel of light from her searchlight moved past ramshackle sheds of corrugated iron, a sand-loader on high stilts above a decrepit loading dock, the rotten skeleton of an old tug. Her exhaust clattered hollowly from the factory walls lining the east bank. An over-powering stench of garbage hung over the estuary like a blanket. The scummy surface of the water was littered with floating debris, orange baskets, shoe boxes, refuse wrapped in paper bags . . .

Mulcahey examined the dial of his strap-watch moodily. "The witching hour, no

less. And instead of me making time with my mouse, here we go shagging after another will-of-the-wisp. Which by rights should be up the alley of the Homicide crew."

Koski manipulated the searchlight so its bright disc focused on a gantry crane which spread its scarecrow arms above a yardful of rusty pipe, discarded plumbing fixtures, junked automobiles.

"The Death Valley boys are on it, Harp. The F.B.I. is on it. Naval Intelligence is sending in a crew of trouble-shooters. The Coast Guard Intelligence is stirring its stumps. They're all busy. Making inquiries along South Street about the bird with the bandaged puss. Checking on Gjersten's mother up in Waterford to see what she knows about his acquaintances. Rounding up dossiers on the babe aboard the *Seavett*, the yacht captain and that dizzy Filipino. Making inquiries about Merrill Ovet. There are a couple of men around the Wyatt girl's studio in case Ovet shows up. But everybody's shorthanded; any delay might cost the lives of a lot of good guys out on the Atlantic. They want all the weight on it they can get; could we so kindly cover the waterfront end since we have a little head start on the others."

"It does not prevent me from registering a slight beef. While you are away hobgobbling with the idle rich, I give my sweetie a buzz; she's off me for life. Is it my fault I have to work sixteen hours instead of a legitimate eight? Hey!" Mulcahey registered belated astonishment. "What brings out all the brass for this one dead man? Especially since nobody knows who he is? How does one single stiff rate so much attention from the armed forces?"

"You might find out if you keep those Hibernian ears open for what the short-waves are saying." Koski held the circle of light on a steel bulkhead that marked the end of navigable water. "End of the line. All ashore that's going ashore."

"Mrs. Mulcahey raised no radio experts. So I am none too sure I snatch the significance of your remark." The sergeant manipulated the clutch-lever. Water boiled up around the patrol-boat's stern. She glided to a dead stop six inches from the bulkhead. "You refer to that crystal gimmick?"

"Yair. The tech lab has it. They tested it out; it could only send or receive on the 2900 band. Not like a regular broadcast receiver. You can't tune a crystal set; only sends or receives on one fixed frequency. According to the particular crystal you have plugged in. But you can take one crystal out of a set and stick another one in. So that gadget we found could be used on any short-wave set."

"I begin to gather in a glimmer . . ."

"Reason the Navy and the Cee-Gee are doing nipups,—the Federal Communications Commission hasn't permitted broadcasting on 2900 kilocycles for quite a while."

"Do I comprehend your meaning? It might have been used to talk abroad?"

"Not that far, Marconi. But given enough wattage behind it, with a high enough antenna, no reason it couldn't get a message to one of those schickel-subs, offshore ten or twenty miles."

Mulcahey looked as if he was about to sneeze. "That is another color of a horse. We might be bunking up against them Gestapo ginzos?"

"There you go. Start gumshoeing around for a thick-necked Nordic with a guttural accent." Koski clambered onto planks covered with coal dust. "You ought to lay off those shifting pictures; you'll be seeing spots in front of your eyes. All the Ratzis aren't German, by a damn sight. There's plenty of scum floating around in the good old Oo-Ess who'd like to help the fascists put over their program."

"True for you. The dirty dogs. Have any of the other johndarmes made inquiry about such an apparatus aboard the *Seavett*, now?"

"I saw one there, myself. A twenty-five watt set. Cap says it's only used for communicating with the Cee-Gee."

"We are not duty bound to take his word, skipper."

"**I**LL SAY we're not. Then again, maybe he's giving us straight but isn't wise to what's been going on aboard his command."

"A yacht on patrol like that would be a very handy spot for anyone who wished to observe sailings down the Sound, if I do not mistake."

"You got right, Joe. But that doesn't hook up with this epidemic of sinkings lately. The convoys that have been taking the beating were made up of vessels that went out of the harbor the other way. Through the Narrows."

"Nevertheless and notwithstanding, it is something to think about."

"Are you bragging?" Koski drifted into the murk, called back: "Break out the canned heat, Sarge. Brew yourself a spot of scoff. Keep yourself awake. And keep that volume up. WPEG might let us know if the Medical Examiner's office has anything for us."

He made his way swiftly past shipyards and warehouses, broken-down shacks, odorous tenements,—came to a dismal district of poolrooms, coffee-pots, dime-a-dance halls. Sandwiched between a pawnshop and a fruit-store was a narrow window with an anemic display of ironed shirts and collars against a wrinkled poster advertising the China Relief Fund. There was a curtain behind the window; the shade was drawn at the door, but a thread of light showed at the sill.

He rapped on the glass. There was a shuffling inside. The shade was pulled back a crack; a placid, waxy face appeared. The Chinaman shook his head, smiled, dropped the shade into place.

Koski hammered on the glass. "Hey! Open up in there."

The face materialized again, unsmiling.

The Lieutenant held his badge up in a cupped hand. A key turned.

"Police? For me?"

Koski got inside. "Keep your didies dry. Just want to ask some questions." A radio in the back room announced five minutes of the latest news gathered from the far corners of the earth.

"Question? Yes?"

"Where's your list of customers?"

Hong Hop tucked his hands into black sateen sleeves, shook his head impassively.

"No list. Too many customer. Don't know address."

"I was afraid of that." Koski eyed the package rack, filled with thin shirt-sized bundles. "Most of the stuff you wash is clothing?"

"Shirt. Drawer. Sock. Everybody get back from Hong." The loud-speaker said something about General MacArthur.

"Okay. Nobody says you stole anything. How many customers send you bed-linen?"

"Please?"

"Sheets. Pillowslips. Maybe blankets."

Hong felt of his fingernails. "Few."

"Name 'em."

The laundryman went to a shoe box stuck in one of the compartments of the rack, began to paw over pink, torn pieces of paper. The newscaster's round tones reported:

"The Navy Department announces the sinking of a medium-sized merchant vessel, somewhere in the North Atlantic. The sinking occurred on the fourteenth of last month. Survivors were landed at an East Coast port."

Koski made an unintelligible growling sound; his eyes were angry. *Survivors landed at an East Coast port!* After how many days and nights of fear and suffering! What about those who weren't survivors, who had faced it out there on the cold dark sea, knowing it was the windup! Did they think it was easy because the announcer said it quick!

Hong put the slips back in the box. "No sheet."

"I didn't ask you if you *had* any. Whose sheets do you wash when you wash 'em?"

"Different people. Sure."

Koski put his hands flat on the counter, leaned over it. "Listen. You want China to lick Japan?"

The laundryman showed white, even teeth.

"Okay. The U. S. is helping China?"

"Yes. Helping."

"All right. I'm trying to find a man who may be a spy. Understand? Against this country. And China."

"Japanese?"

"No. Likely isn't a German or an Italian, either. Most likely an American. Only way I can run him down is by a piece of sheet that had your laundry mark on it."

"How long 'go?"

"Week or so."

Hong stared at a fly on the ceiling. Then he looked at Koski. "Agarapoulous."

"How's that? Say it slow."

"Agarappoulous. Runs saloon." He ducked his head quickly, seized a black

crayon, made a mark on the fresh ticket. "His place. Saloon." He grinned, handed over the paper. "Sign like this."

Koski looked at it.

— O

"Big Dommy's place? The Bar-Nothing Ranch?"

"Yes, yes. I do sheets."

"Copacetti, Chungking. Keep it under your hat. No talk. Catch?"

Hong scratched an armpit. "Catch."

Big Dominick's place was a couple of blocks north, a conglomerate establishment of restaurant, saloon, hotel and dance hall. There was no quivering neon in the sign over the door to the saloon; the windows had been painted black.

"Gangway!" Koski shouldered into a hard-faced crowd lounging around the doorway. "One side." They made way.

Inside, fluorescent lights gave an unhealthy appearance to the crowd lining the horseshoe bar. A juke-box glowed cerise and purple, *wah-wah'd* booming. The air was heavy with smoke, sour beer, sweat, perfume. The Bar-Nothing wasn't as full as Koski had usually seen it but the crowd was the same.

Shipyard hands and longshoremen in dungarees; seamen and stokers; Portuguese, Danes, Mexicans, Negroes, Lascars, Chinamen. A few panhandlers drinking their take; a knot of Irish laborers in noisy argument; a solitary drinker with no chin and foxy, protruding teeth; two greasy-faced youths in barrel-top pants and long pinch-waisted coats. And girls, —of every age, shape, size, and condition of sobriety.

Koski elbowed through to the far end of the horseshoe. Behind the shiny chromium of the cash register, a fat-jawed Buddha gave no sign of recognition. He inspected Koski coldly with small, pale eyes encased in folds of tallow-gray flash.

"How you doing, Dommy?" The Lieutenant got his elbows on the bar.

"Bad enough." The lipless slit of a mouth hardly opened. "Lousy enough without Little Boy Blue come blowing his horn to drive patrons away."

"If I blow, it won't be to drive anyone away. On the contrary. Mix me a lime and Jamaica."

Big Dommy reached mechanically for

the rum bottle. "If you got to make a collar, for Pete's sake, take the guy out in the alley first. Last time I had a free-for-all in here it cost me two hundred clams for breakage." The puffy eyelids blinked; the sausage of fat beneath his chin wrinkled like the neck of a turtle withdrawing into its shell.

"I don't want much." Koski sniffed the liquor. "What do you cut this with?"

The colorless eyes stared stonily. "Carbolic acid. Get to it. You're not boosting business."

"How's for a personally conducted tour of the joint? Just me and you."

"In your hat. Where the hell would I get off with my trade if they saw me stooling around with you!"

Koski drank. "That's your problem. Come on. Les' go." He set the glass on the bar.

"You putting on a pinch?"

"I will if I have to. I'm fanning the rooms, upstairs. You want to make me get a search-warrant, close you down?"

The saloonkeeper cursed bitterly. "Why don't you ask your beat-man if I'm pulling anything, before you bull around? This place is run legitimate."

"What you sweating about?" The Lieutenant waited until Dommy had circled the end of the bar. "I'm not on the Vice Squad."

The fat man waddled to a blue-painted door, flung it open angrily. "Why do you have to futz around outside your own precinct? Why couldn't you call up the Captain, here? He'll set you right . . . on your tail." He swore again, thickly, lumbered out into a narrow hall, grabbed a shaky banister and began to haul himself up brass-treaded stairs.

"Get moving." Koski followed him into the hall, left the door open. "I haven't got all night."

"Just long enough to wreck my setup. Look at that bar. There won't be a nickel coming across it in five minutes. All because somebody leaves a manhole open and a stink blows in."

Koski got to the foot of the steps. "You're going to talk yourself into a punch in the teeth—"

The light went out. The hall door slammed. Somebody jumped him, from behind. Big Dommy turned, swung on

him. Koski got in one solid punch to the fat man's face; heard him grunt. The Greek retreated up the stairs, swung his foot from the higher step, kicked the Harbor man in the head.

Then blows rained on him. Arms pinned his arms to his side. His knees buckled.

The blows were cushioned by unconsciousness . . .

IX

WHEN KOSKI opened his eyes, he was looking at a ceiling. The ceiling was gray, mottled with irregular brown stains; a crack ran across it from one corner to the other with tributary cracks spreading out like forks of a river. His head left as if somebody were squeezing it in a vise; he moved it enough to see the foot of a white, iron bed. He put his hand flat to push himself on his side, felt coarse mattress ticking beneath him.

He rolled over. Big Dommy sat in a kitchen chair three feet away. A pink-striped pillow without a pillowslip lay in the saloonkeeper's lap; his arms lay across it, the hands on his knees. Koski's service-special was in the fat man's right hand. Dommy's face was congested; one of his eyelids was blue and swelling. His neck glistened with sweat.

"I've been trying to think of some reason why I shouldn't cancel you. I can't think of any."

"I can tell you one." Speech came clumsily; Koski's lips were bruised; his tongue felt as thick as a rubber heel. "My partner will be around."

"No dice. You've been out nearly half an hour. It's after one. If you *had* a partner an' if he *was* coming, he'd be here before this."

"You don't know Mulcahey. He might have taken a shine to some jane on the way over."

"He should have come here first. I got some nice numbers downstairs."

"Headquarters knows where I am, too."

Dommy shook his head. "I could name half a dozen people who saw you walk outa here."

"You must be loaded to the gills." Koski levered himself, painfully, to a sitting position, sparred for time. It didn't look as if he was going to be able to do much

in the time he had. Nobody would be likely to hear him if he yelled; the juke-box was blasting full force; *Jingle, Jangle, Jingle*. There was nothing to use for a weapon, nor any question of getting the gun away from Dommy, without getting a .38 slug in the wrong spot. "If you snap the switch on me, it's better than even money you burn."

"I been taking chances all my life."

"You'll be hot, all the rest of it. Even if they don't tie a conviction on you."

"I'd sooner be hot, on the outside looking in, than cooling on the inside looking out. I'm a two-time loser already on account some of your stinking finks frame me into Dannemora on a phony Mann Act rap. So what's the odds? You come around, pin something on me—and there's the judge ready to throw the book at me for being a habitual criminal. Habitual ——!" The muzzle of the gun swung slowly around until Koski could look straight along the barrel.

"How'd you know I was going to pin something on you?" The Lieutenant gauged his chances of taking the pistol away, decided they were no good.

"The name is Dommy. Not dummy. Why you think I had you tossed in here?" The pale eyes stared at a point on the mattress close to the detective's fingers.

KOSKI looked down. The red-brown stain had been underneath him; it covered half of the mattress. He propped himself up, groaned at the stab of pain in his side. It felt as if someone had run a red-hot skewer in under his heart. A cracked rib, probably. What the hell. What difference did a cracked rib make when you were about to have your last look at the light! That was what he was due to have in a second, now. "Yair. This is where he got it, hah?"

Dommy nodded slowly. "Where you get it, too." He held the pillow out with one hand, stuck the pistol-muzzle in the middle, folded the pillow back around the gun. He bent forward, pushed the pillow-ticking toward the Lieutenant's face.

Koski put out a forearm, warded it off. "Oh, no. Not as easy as that. Not through the forehead so it'll look like suicide when they find me finished with one of the bullets from my own gun." He got one

knee twisted around under him. "I'd as soon have you work on me with a saw, the way you did the other guy."

The fat man removed the revolver from the pillow, leaned back in his chair, stuck the weapon out rigidly at arm's length in front of him. "Who was this . . . other guy?"

"You don't know. You just cut him up for practice."

"I don't know," Dommy blinked rapidly. "I didn't kill him. I didn't cut him up. A gun is quicker. It don't waste good sheets."

"If you're leveling on that, Dommy, I might make a deal with you."

The Greek smiled thinly. "Go ahead. Deal. I got the big ace, already." He sighted along the barrel.

"You say your nose is clean on this other thing. Okay. Give me the low on that—I'll keep you out of it. We forgets about that mugging down on the stairs. And this." He wagged his fingers at the revolver.

"I never trust a cop until he's at the undertaker's."

"You get along with the boys at your precinct all right, don't you? Maybe you slip 'em a bonus for their birthdays, now and again. Okay. You can do *me* something."

"Paying off so I'll be let alone to make a dollar is one thing. That's not stooling. Before I'd stooge for any cruddy cop, I'd—"

Koski slid one foot over the edge of the bed. "You're in the driver's seat. I can't tell you how fast to go. If you won't help—don't get in my way. I can get what I want from whoever takes the two bucks from the occupants of the rooms."

"You don't get anything. From anybody. You're in no position to get anything. . . ."

Koski leaned out over the edge of the bed; his other foot touched the floor. His eyes were bloodshot; his hair stood up stiffly like rope ends. "All bets off," he growled. "Hell! I'd play ball with a pimp or a gunman if I have to—but there's no use trying to string along with a half-wit!" He braced his hands on the edge of the bed frame at either side.

"Get back!" Dommy snarled. "I'll give it to you!"

Koski leaned away from the gun, turning his body a little to the right. His left leg straightened slowly; it was a natural movement to balance the weight of his body as he leaned back. "Go on. Get it over with. You haven't sense enough to recognize a good break. Instead of being readied up for a leg-shave and a nice, new set of electrodes, you could be in the clear—" his foot touched a rung; the toe hooked it, "—with the word passed down the line to lay off you—" he jerked up on the rung, threw himself backward flat on the bed.

THE FRONT legs of the chair came up. Dommy squeaked; flung out his arms to regain his own balance. The gun went off. Powder grains stung Koski's ear; the metal of the bed *pinged* loudly; the fingers of his left hand tingled. The Greek crashed over backward.

He was on his knees when Koski rolled off the bed. Dommy tried to get the .38 angled upward in time. The detective dived, landed on the fat man's neck. The flabby shoulders went down; the puffy face smashed against the floor.

Koski got a grip on the bulbous throat, hauled the Greek up to a sitting posture. The man from the Harbor Squad hunched his right shoulder, drove his fist to a spot just above the pendant necklace of fat. Dommy's body sagged as if it had been a sack of mush, but Koski held him up by the hair, hit him twice more, carefully, in the same spot. Then he let the lump of flesh collapse.

Koski picked up his gun, gritting his teeth at the slashing agony in his side. There was a washbowl at the head of the bed; he let cold water run into the chipped enamel bowl, doused his head, rinsed his mouth. Threadbare towels, smelling of disinfectant, hung on a hook. But he dried his face with his handkerchief, looked around for his hat. It wasn't in the room.

He squatted beside Dommy, went through his pockets. There was a wallet with a wad of singles, a gold Elgin on a thin platinum chain with a gold penknife on the other end, a ten-cent pocket diary with entries scribbled against various dates: January 10, *Oranges*, \$75; January 24, *Figs*, \$50; Feb. 7, *Figs*, \$25; Feb. 21, *Apples*, \$50. Koski put the book back

in Dommy's vest. The only thing he kept was the penknife and a thick bunch of keys.

He used the penknife to slit out the top of the mattress ticking, which he folded and stuffed into his hip pocket. Then he tried the keys on the ring until he found one that locked the door of the bedroom.

He went out into the hall, looked at the number on the door. It was 5. He turned the key in the lock, put the key ring in his pocket.

Below, in the barroom, the juke-box was rumbling boogie-woogie. Upstairs, the lights were on again. He considered the advisability of going down to locate the master switch that must have been pulled, decided it would waste time.

He moved along the hall, toward the head of the stairs. The office was on a landing one step below the second-floor level; he could see the green-painted "desk," the open register and the keyrack. Someone was moving around, out of sight.

He dug the .38 out of its armpit holster, stepped quietly around the jamb of the door.

An enormous Negress in a shapeless dress and loose straw slippers on her feet sat in a low rocker, tapping her feet on the floor to the rhythm of the juke-box below. There was a knitting bag on the floor beside her, a nearly finished sweater in her lap.

She rolled her eyes at the gun but didn't get up or stop rocking. "Shah! Put that thing away. Ain't no call for we'p'n's, up heah, mister. Down below, maybe yu need fiah-ahms. But not on the second flo'. This *my* flo'. I don't allow no disturbances of the peace, up heah."

Koski holstered the pistol. "You the night clerk?"

"I'm Dora. I run this place. Day *an'* night. I mean I *run* it. You want a room fo' tonight?"

His grin was a little lopsided on account of a swollen lip. "I want some information."

She stopped rocking but went on knitting. "That's about the scahsest thing they is aroun'."

He leaned against the desk. "I'm not hard to satisfy. Let's start with the occupant of Room Five, yesterday."

X

DORA GOT UP, laid her knitting bag on the chair, put the sweater on top of it. "Dick, ain't yuh? New one, roun' here?"

"Not too new. I won't stand for a brush-off, anyway. What about the guy in Five?" He reached for the register, flapped over the pages.

"I don't know nothing 'bout Room Five." She clopped around behind the desk with short, wary steps.

"Dommy says different."

"I ain't heah him say so."

The only entry against the fifth numeral for Sunday was a carelessly printed MR. & MRS. T. JOSLIN. The name probably wouldn't mean anything, anyway, he knew. Nobody gave his right name in a dive like this.

"You were supposed to change the sheets and pillowslips in there. Weren't any sheets to change. You saw the mattress. You know what happened."

She eyed him stolidly. "You gonna run me in? You know I ain't goin' to do no squawkin'."

"You don't understand the set-up, Dora." He rested his right elbow on the counter; it lessened the pain in his side. "Your boss is in wrong. Up to here." He touched his neck. "I had to flatten him; I'll have to book him. Any number of charges—obstructing an officer, Sullivan violation, assault with intent to kill—enough to put him on a state diet long enough to thin him down quite a lot. He'll be in the lineup in the morning. The payoff boys over at the station won't burn their fingers on him now."

"Ain't goin' singe none of my hair, neither. Keepin' my mouth shut ain't never got me in no mess."

"Going to get you in one, now. Person who fails to report a murder to the police can be charged as accessory."

"Don't high-jive me. I minds my own business strickly—"

"Pretty puking business. Covering up for a killer who saws his victim's head off."

The Negress slapped a hand up to her lips. "Yu lyin'! To sca'h me!"

"Grab your coat. We'll hop over to

the morgue. I'll show it to you."

"Was that what happen? Hones' to Moses?"

"Cut up in hunks. Like a side of beef. Wrapped in pieces torn off the sheet. Heaved in the river. Haven't found all of it yet."

Dora wrinkled her nose. "Wouldn't want nobody to think I got any truck with that beheadin' stuff."

"All right. Talk."

"I don't know nothin', hardly."

"Maybe it'll be enough." His finger tapped the register. "What'd this Joslin look like?"

"Now you problems me. Man who pays me fo' Five look like a sailor. He wear glasses."

Koski dragged a description out of her, piecemeal. It corresponded roughly with Ansel's age, height, weight and coloring. The man had checked in around three-thirty Sunday afternoon, with a blonde girl and a black suitcase.

"But he don' sign in. He's s'pose to. He say he do so. But he don'."

"How'd he get by you?"

"I'm down th' hall gittin' sheets out the closet. He come in from the office with this girl an' the bag. He got his money in his han'; he give it to me an' say he sign the book. But when I go look, he ain' done so. I figure on makin' him do it when he come out—but I don' see him come out."

"You don't know how long they stayed in there?"

"I ain' seen neither him or her go out. But I don' think *he* stay long."

"You find the door of Five unlocked?"

"Uh, uh. But I see some other man come out." She craned her neck to see past Koski, into the hall. "Them gals ain't puhmitted to stay in no room twice on one pay. Boss, he persist agains' it."

"This other man a sailor, too?"

"I couldn't tell nothin' 'bout him; he got a cloth wrap' all roun' his face."

"Bandage."

"Must been."

"How you know the blonde was still in there?"

"Don' know, pos'tive. Ain't many men comes up heah for no otheh reason, excep' cravin' female comp'ny. An' when I asks him what business he got in Five

when he ain' paid me, he just laugh kind of as if I *knows* why he in there. So he reach in his pocket; give me some money. I make him go sign on the register heah. So they ain't no need to say nothin' 'bout it to the boss."

"**E**SPECIALLY since you got paid double, hah?" Koski tried to synchronize the crime. Gjersten had been back on board the yacht at five-thirty or so. The killing in Room Five must have been done after that. "What time'd you see this other man?"

"'Round nine, I put it. I jus' finish my suppah. I eats late Sundays."

"Didn't you think there was something funny about a bird with a bandaged face . . . coming out of another man's room?"

"Didn' ponder it so much, right then. Sees plenty peculiar things 'round this place. But when I find them sheets an' pillahcases gone an' all that blood sticky on that mattress, I say to myself, 'Them white folks been cuttin' each other up. But they ain't no remains lyin' dead aroun' so mos' likely nobody got hurt fatal.'"

"You knew somebody'd been killed, all right. Must have been enough blood for a slaughterhouse, even after the murderer'd sopped it up with the sheets and drained it down the washbowl. When'd you get in the room?"

"This mornin'. Monday mornin'. Wasn't no more need for the room las' night; we had plenty empties. Anyhow, I ain't suppose to clean up without I find the key on the hook." She curved a thumb toward the numbered board. "Man might been sleepin' off a load, way he was hollerin' an' carryin' on las' night."

"He was yelling? When was this? Why the hell didn't you say so . . .!"

"Shah. Ain' nothin' special 'bout singin' in *this* shebang. Man puts down some of that mule-hoof they pour over that bar, he *feels* like hollerin'."

"What was he singing?"

"Differen' things. Like men off ships do. One I hear befo'." She threw back her head, set her arms akimbo, sang in a rich, easy contralto:

*"Many brave souls are asleep
In the deep . . . so beware
Be . . . e . . . e . . . e . . . ware."*

Koski understood. "He'd have to do something to cover up the sound of the saw when he was cutting up the body. A concert for the corpse. Fine stuff. Would you be able to recognize this song-bird if you saw him again?"

"'Deed I don' know. I misdoubt I would. He got his cap pull down oveh his eyes. With that cloth all roun' his face, I don' see 'nough to remember."

"How about the girl? The blonde he was with? Remember her?"

"She just one them poor tramps, picks up men downstairs, brings 'em upstairs."

"Know her name?"

Dora closed her eyes, moved her head slowly from left to right, back again. "I wouldn't get one them in trouble, nohow. They livin' the hard way, without me worsenin' things on 'em."

"Get wise! You might be saving her life. If she spotted this killer, he might come around and put the dot on her so she wouldn't be able to identify him."

"You hear me say I don' know her."

"Yair. You know her." Koski touched his swollen lip. "If you see her again, no tip-off, hear?"

"Furthes' out this thing I can keep, better off I like it."

"You're not out of it, by a long shot. You're liable to be a mark for this chopper, yourself. There'll be a plainclothesman on post downstairs, for a while. If you see this blonde or anyone who looks like the bird with the bandage, go down and tell the officer. Don't think you can play hide-and-seek with this killer. You'd be safer juggling dynamite." He strode stiffly back up the corridor to Room Five; unlocked the door.

Dommy was motionless on the floor, his eyes closed.

Koski took out his gun. "Don't bother with it, fink. I'm not so dizzy I can't remember where I left you. Up on your pins."

The saloonkeeper opened his good eye, mumbled: "You broke my jaw."

"I didn't. But I might. Allez oop, now."

The fat man rolled over on his back, doubled up his knees. "You made a deal with me."

"In a horse's rosette. I would have. But you wanted it all your way. It didn't

go your way. So you're for it. Stand up and take your dose." Koski swung the pistol barrel, hit the Greek on one knee-cap.

DOMMY YELPED, nursed his knee with pudgy hands. "What'll it take to square things?"

"More than you've got." Koski thought a moment. "Unless maybe you could save me some time."

"I would go a long ways," the fat man wheezed to his feet, "to save myself twenty years."

"Now, you would. Well, I'll give a try. I want the girl who came up to this room yesterday afternoon with a sailor by the name of Gjersten. She's one of your regulars. A blonde. She checked in around three-thirty." He gave a description of Ansel, mentioned the thick-lensed spectacles.

"The guy is a stranger to me. About the blonde, I'll have to ask around the babes. I don't keep a double-entry system on them, no matter what you headquarters lugs think. They don't work for me. I just rent rooms."

"Go on and make inquiries, Snow White. This is a rush order."

Dommy limped to the door. "No charge, huh? You aren't fixing to slip over a fast one?"

"Depends." Koski prodded him in the small of the back with the .38. "On how good a bird dog you are."

They went out in the hall. The Lieutenant locked the door behind them. "Keep out! This means you! And all your scummy crew. The Homicide outfit will want in on that. For prints, photos, whatnot. Hands off . . . savvy?"

Dora barely glanced up from her knitting as they passed the office. Going downstairs aggravated the lancing hurt in Koski's side; his voice was brittle when he stopped Dommy at the barroom door.

"Get it right, slug. I can't watch all the things that might crawl out from behind your woodwork. So I watch you." He stuck the gun, muzzle down, under his belt inside his pants, pulled the vest down over the grip. "I can't afford to take any more chances. You'll have to take 'em."

The fat man cringed. "You can't hold

me responsible for what some other gee might do."

"Don't bet on it, futz-face. I'll arrange it so all the sulfanilamide in the city won't help you any—at the first crack. Bear it in mind." He shoved the saloonkeeper into the barroom, kept close at Dommy's heels.

There were only a dozen customers around the horseshoe; a couple of them departed hurriedly as soon as the two men came in from the hall. Conversation among the other drinkers dwindled. The fox-faced man grinned slyly at Dommy, wiped froth off a smudge of mustache.

The Greek side-stepped around the end of the bar, went into whispered consultation with a baldheaded bartender who kept buffing the top of his skull with the hollow of his palm. Koski rested his left elbow on the mahogany rim. He thought a drink might quiet the hammering at his temples.

"Fizz me a lime and Jamaica while you're chewing the fat, Dommy. Double the prescription."

The baldheaded man wiped drippings off the bar with his apron, looked at Koski sideways. Dommy came over with the drink.

"We can't finger the girl without we know the man. How we gonna know which one he was, out of maybe five hundred clucks who come in an' out every day?"

"Name was Gjersten. Ansel Gjersten." Koski winced as the rum stung the cut in his lip. "Wasn't an ordinary seaman. Yacht-hand. Engineer." He caught a sudden movement in the mirror at Dommy's left, swung around with his back to the bar.

There was no one near him. The motion he had seen came from the direction of the fox-faced man with the buck teeth and seedy mustache. The man wasn't looking in Koski's direction; he stood with one foot on the rail, his elbows on the bar, his shoulders hunched over a glass of beer.

Koski turned back to the Greek. "I can't be waiting around till you close up. Get action." He saw the movement in the mirror again. The fox-faced individual was dipping his forefinger in his glass, wetting it, then drawing something on the polished surface of the bar. It

was the sort of preoccupied thing a man might do if he was deep in thought and unaware he was noticed.

Dommy swore, beneath his breath. "You got to give me time enough to feel around a little."

The chinless man finished his tracing, picked up his glass, drained it. Then he set it gently back on the bar, turned away from Koski and sauntered out of the saloon.

"Give you time enough to cook up a batch of hamburgs, Dommy." Koski wanted a smoke but he couldn't load a pipe with one hand. "Say about half a dozen. With onion. See if the chef can slice the Bermudas thicker than paper, will you?"

The Greek cursed again, joggled away to give the order through the service-window. Koski edged crabwise along the bar, reached for a basket of pretzels.

Beside the empty beer glass letters gleamed wetly on the bar. They were crude and already fading. But Koski could read:

CL A I R E

XI

HE TOOK the basket back to his drink. Dommy was in a huddle with another bartender who carefully avoided Koski's eyes.

After a while the Lieutenant took his glass, went into a phone booth opposite the bar, kept an eye on the bar through the booth door.

He used a nickel, talked to the Sixth Detective Division. There was no report from the men covering the Wyatt studio. He got through to the doctor on night duty at the Medical Examiner's office. The autopsy hadn't showed anything beyond the fact that the murdered man had once fractured his collar bone; that he had eaten roast beef and spinach and potatoes some time before his death; there were indications the man had been severely beaten, abrasions, some *hematoma*, numberless *ecchymoses*. Koski said:

"I'm no Quiz Kid, doc. If the guy was beaten up, he was beaten up. You don't have to use all the drugstore lingo." He hung up.

An old woman in a frayed shawl hobbled

in with an armful of tabloids. Koski paid a dime for one.

The murder was on page eleven. "Torso" wasn't in the headline. Black capitals said:

GANG VENGEANCE SUSPECTED IN SUITCASE KILLING

There wasn't anything to the story. A body had been found; it hadn't been identified; an unnamed high official issued a vague warning that the authorities were cracking down on all criminals known to be connected with the policy racket—there was to be no such sinister growth of violence as followed in the wake of the last war. . . .

A single dead man didn't cause a ripple on the surface of news that told of thousands maimed or killed every day, Koski reflected grimly. It would get more attention one of these days if it turned out that the short-wave crystal was really part of the picture—that would jolt a lot of people who still thought ship sinkings, men swimming in burning oil or drowning in icy water, was something far away from Forty-second Street. But he was glad no hint of that angle had reached print. He wanted no publicity, not yet awhile. He stuck the folded paper in his pocket, went back to the bar.

Dommy brought a brown paper bag. "For free. I'm breaking house rules, too. The ration regulations say only two to a person. . . ."

"I'm not going to cram 'em all down my own throat. What else you got for me?"

The Greek mopped his face with his handkerchief. "Nothing. You don't have to ride me. I'm doing the best I can."

"Is there a blonde hangs around here—" Koski unwrapped the wax paper from one of the sandwiches, smelled of it, "—by the name of Claire-something-or-other?"

"Claire?" Dommy spoke through venriquoist's lips. "Wait. I'll ask Riley."

"Save it. Ask him in the back room. At the station." Koski moved his head toward the phone booth. "I just buzzed the precinct."

Dommy's eyes were as expressionless as a blind man's. "Yap! Yap! Yap! Why'n't you call off your dogs; you think I keep a card index of these tomatoes!"

"I know what you keep. Better climb into your coat."

"YOU ACT like it hurt you to stand still a second. Lemme catch my breath." Dommy fumbled for a bottle behind him, spilled four fingers of rye into a highball glass, gulped it. "Would she be a skinny little piece? Toothpick gams? Flat chest?"

"Claire what?"

"Purdo," the Greek husked.

"Address?"

"How can you expect me—"

Koski jerked a length of steel chain from his left hip pocket, held it out, made it jingle. A nicked *T* was attached to each end of the chain.

Dommy refused to notice it, whispered hoarsely: "Somewhere on Treanor. Twenty-one Treanor Place. Damn your guts for making me stool."

Koski put the twisters away, held out his hand, palm up. "There's a hat of mine around somewhere. The hat . . . or five bucks for a new one."

Riley produced the felt from under the bar. Koski brushed it with his sleeve. "This doesn't wash it up. I haven't got the girl yet. I haven't got the lad who did the job in Room Five. Until I do, you're on the hook. And I'm on the other end of the line."

He found the call-box on the corner, used his key, talked to the precinct desk. In two minutes a green-and-white coupé rolled up. In another two, Koski was standing in a hallway of a three-story tenement, odorous of musty carpeting disinfectant and a heavy sickening sweetness that reminded him of Harlem.

The punched-aluminum tag on the door said *Mrs. Claire Rawson Purdo*; there was no answer to his knock; nobody came out in the hall to see what he wanted. He returned to the patrol car.

"Lady isn't in." His eyes searched the block, without result. "Dommy might have got to her first."

The uniformed man behind the wheel scratched his chin. "Can't expect a working woman to be at home during business hours. It's only quarter past two."

"Late enough, with us nosing around on a cold trail. Ask your desk to scour the district for her. Set a watch at

Dommy's. Go through his place, top to bottom. Here's your passport." Koski gave him the keys he had taken from the Greek. "And after you roll me around to the Gowanus, come back here and stick on this door. I want this babe; I want her bad."

The car dropped him at the edge of a vacant lot littered with pyramids of rubbish. From the coal dock came a rumbling, off-key bass:

*"I'll only be here a minute or so
Said Barnacle Bill the sailor;
I'm on my way to To-kee-yo
Said Barnacle Bill the sailor."*

"You'll be on your way to the canal, in a minute, if you don't pipe down." Koski let himself down gingerly to the foredeck. "How could that dispatcher make himself heard—your roaring like a bull!"

"Set your mind easy, coach. He made himself heard, only about five minutes ago." Mulcahey gawked at the Lieutenant's lip. "Holy mother! Were you mickied?"

"A bunch of the boys were whooping it up. I got muscled around a little. Also, I got a lead." He tossed the paper sack across the cockpit. "Your iron rations. With Big Dommy's compliments."

The Sergeant bit into a hamburger. He held out the bag. "Will you join me, sire?"

"I've had a bellyful, Irish." He sat down on the engine-housing.

"You hurt, skipper?" Mulcahey laid down the hamburg, quickly.

Koski took out his pipe. "Fit as a fiddle, Joe. One rib might need a little tuning up later—but right now I have a couple of chores that need tending." He flicked flame across the bowl. "That stiff wasn't butchered on the yacht. He was killed in Dommy's place. Get going. Back to the Basin."

The Sergeant cast off, pulled the clutch into reverse, backed the police-boat out into the muddy creek. "Was it the geezer with the chin-wrapping?"

"Yair. Chance the killer did get hurt in the brawl, really needed the bandage."

"'Twould fit in better with your notion that these Gestapos do not go in for disguise and so forth."

KOSKI GROANED. "What is that under your cap! We don't know this murderer's a foreign agent. He could be. But there's always the possibility the crystal was simply a leftover from some amateur who used it for experimental sending, back in the days when they allowed it. We've nothing definite on the spy angle. Except the pains taken to destroy the stiff's identity. The fact that the *Seavett* is a Cee-Gee patrol. The coincidence that the owner of the yacht also owns a lot of ships that have been going down offshore."

"If I could get one dim glimmer of the kind of person you are looking for—" Mulcahey detoured to avoid a railroad tie just beneath the surface, "mayhap I would seem a little less befuddled."

"How the hell do I know who we're looking for? He had a bandage around his chops; if he isn't wearing it now, that doesn't help us. He can sing sailors' songs. He knew how to find his way around the Bar-Nothing. He was wearing work clothes or old clothes."

"Thought the Gurlid kid couldn't describe how he was dressed. . . ."

"That's as good as a description."

"Perhaps I am a trifle slow in responding to the acceleration—but I do not get this. . . ."

"She would have noticed if he was wearing anything very different from the men she's used to seeing around the docks."

"Marvelous, how the man figures these things. The only data I can dope out is that he'll be handy with a saw and a butcher knife. And if this radio device belonged to him, he would know something about electricity."

"If he doesn't, he'll learn something about it, one of these days. Up river."

"That reminds me. Up river. I nearly forgot." The Sergeant slewed the wheel, the *Vigilant* rounded the Erie Basin. "You had a message from the dispatcher."

"You and your memory! Give."

"One of the Homicide troupe is playing tag with Bre'er Hurlihan; he seems to have caught up with the gent. The address where he is patiently awaiting your arrival—wait a sec—" he picked up the coffee pot, looked at its side. "Pier Nine. Yeah, I thought that was right."

"You thought! Don't make me split my sore lip." Koski pounded out his

pipe on the gunwale. Sparks cascaded over the stern. "If that super's working, it might mean they're getting some fire-alarm freight on board for a quick clearance. There's a certain guy I wouldn't want to see leave these parts so sudden, Irish. Lean on that throttle!"

The motor's pitch rose a note higher. The hull shuddered. Wings of spray fountained out from the bow.

XII

UNDER the fierce glare of top-shielded lights, Pier Nine was a noiseless nightmare of activity. Rubber-shod longshoremen padded quietly along with pneumatic-tired hand-trucks loaded with steel drums. Rope slings were hoisted soundlessly up over the mud-gray side of the freighter bulking alongside the pier. No donkey engines barked; there was no whining of winch drums or screeching of taut wires; none of the raucous bedlam or bawling of orders which usually provide accompaniment for a rush job of night-loading.

The unnatural hush reminded Koski of an old silent film; the straining figures in jerseys and dungarees lowering the drums gently to thick fiber mats; the absence of the normal clutter of bales, crates, boxes.

Across the end of the pier, a red-enameled truck had been parked: *Chemical Company No. 12*;—three men in dark blue uniforms sat on the running board, with extinguishers at their feet. Sling-men made their lashings fast with an air of tense concentration. As the boss stevedore signaled, palm up to the hoist man, Koski noticed the red and blue concentric circles painted on the end of the drum, read the yellow stenciling:

C - A - U - T - I - O - N
VULCAN CHEMICAL CORP.
—TRINITROTOLUENE—

"They keep telling me there's no danger handling this stuff, Lieutenant." A small, dark man who looked like a prosperous barber emerged from the gloom beyond the loading lights. "All the same, nobody is doing any tap routines while those cans are going aboard."

"Hi, Van. What goes?"

"We all do. If one of these boys should

trip over his own dogs." The Homicide officer pointed toward a plump man in a tight-fitting trench coat, standing by a checker's stand halfway down the pier. "Hurlihan says they already put aboard quite a few tons of smokeless powder and three hundred cases of mine fuses—but the big noise has to be tucked in bed last. Say," he took out a cigarette mechanically, stuck it between his lips, removed it with a grimace. "I pick your friend Hurlihan up at his hotel. I was going to take him down and fling him in the clink, but all you said was you wanted to gat heem. So I just tail him down here."

Koski sized up the superintendent's narrow, sloping shoulders; his round bullet-head, dead-white skin and mat of black, curly hair. "What'd he have to say for himself?"

"Says from eight to ten pee-em Sunday he was at Leon and Eddie's. I bet it's the first time that place's ever been used for an alibi."

"Anybody with him?"

"Pal of his. Lawyer for the Line. Fella name of Fross. I couldn't get Fross on the phone to check it, but Hurlihan says plenty of other people who know him saw him here . . . including Leon."

"He go there straight from the *Seavett*?"

"Claims he went to his hotel, first. Doesn't admit knowing anything about any trouble on the yacht. He could be putting on an act. But he don't seem to be fretting himself about anything except the twenty-four hundred cans of this stuff." Van jerked a thumb toward a drum twirling slowly as it ascended over their heads. "You can't blame him for that. I've aged a couple of years since midnight, myself."

"Okay, Ponce de Leon. Go find yourself a fountain of youth. I'll take over." Koski walked over to the checker's stand, touched the superintendent's shoulder.

Van came up behind him. "Here's a gent you better not try to give the brush-off, Mister Hurlihan. Meet Lieutenant Koski." Van eased away.

Hurlihan glanced up from the stowage plan, fluttered a fat palm at the file of loaded trucks being trundled out of the pier shed. "Don't bother me now. This stuff's dangerous. Got to watch it every second."

"You're not the only guy watching it." Koski eyed two men in belted raincoats and white caps bearing the gold shield of the Coast Guard; they stood on the alert just beyond the checker's stand.

"I'm responsible for getting it in the holds." Fear flickered in Hurlihan's gray eyes. "Those lads have cost me a couple hours already, giving the once-over to my dock gang. Now you cops come along. Lord knows when we'll get done now." He pulled his coat collar tighter. "Tugs'll be here at five tomorrow afternoon. Hatches have to be battened down by then, win, lose, or draw. How the hell can they expect us to make overnight turnarounds with everybody butting in—"

"Must keep you kiting. Been on the job all day?"

"Since half-past eight this morning. What is this? A third degree?"

"You'll know it if we have to put you over the hurdles. Here on the pier all the time?"

"Out here. In my office. In the bath-room, if you have to be so damn nose-y."

"Seen young Ovett? Heard from him?"

"Hide nor hair. Since I left the *Seavett*."

"After you had that scrap with him over your attentions to his wife, didn't he follow you off the yacht?"

"Nothing of the kind." Hurlihan wagged his head in emphatic denial. "There wasn't any fight. Merrill and I didn't even discuss Mrs. Ovett. Nobody followed me when I went ashore. Did Merrill sic you on me?"

"The guy who sicced us onto you is packed in ice up at the City mortuary on Twenty-ninth."

HURLIHAN opened his mouth, closed it, squinted at Van. "That's why you been keeping tabs on me the last hour? Because you think I killed somebody." He snorted. "You damned dimwits, I don't even know who's dead!"

"You haven't anything on us. There isn't enough left of this guy to tell. What we have checks with the description of Ansel Gjersten. The *Seavett's* engineer."

The superintendent's chin sank on his chest. He shoved his hands deep in his coat pockets. "Ansel was live enough the

last time I saw him. I had no more reason to kill him than I have . . . you, for instance. I don't know who murdered him. Or why. Or the first thing about it."

"What were you doing on the yacht? Besides playing boops-a-daisy with Mrs. Ovett?"

"Hadn't anything to do with Gjersten. Purely a matter of business."

"I've heard of murder for business reasons."

"Nothing like that in this." Hurlihan took an envelope from an inside pocket, extracted a paper. "I went out to get Barbara's proxy. To vote her shares at the special stockholders' meeting next week."

"How come you get her proxy?" Koski scanned the document, stuck it in his pocket. "When her husband's in the offing?"

"Hey, that's *mine!* Gimme that!"

"Control yourself. Number of things I don't savvy about these proceedings. Why doesn't young Ovett handle his wife's business affairs?"

"Merrill,"—Hurlihan picked his words cautiously—"won't act to protect his own interests—to say nothing of Barabara's. The Line is shaping up for a terrific breakdown. On paper, we're making a profit. At sea, we're losing so many ships we'll be out of business in six months. That's the thing some of us are trying to put a stop to."

"What'll you do? Keep 'em afloat with proxies?"

"We could cut our losses, under the right management." The superintendent swore under his breath as a longshoreman slipped on the wet planking of the pier, nearly let a drum topple over. "Better engines, to hop up speed; it's the ship that drags behind the convoy that gets *versenkt*. Better loading; to prevent cargo from shifting and cutting down knots. Younger captains, trained in blind navigation, so they won't stray out of convoy at night. These new intercommunicating systems that won't get out of kilter in an emergency."

Koski growled: "Is young Ovett against improvements?"

"His father is. Because they cost dough. Merrill doesn't seem to give a damn. The crowd I'm with want new

blood at the top, to spend the money, save the ships. And the men. Doesn't sound as if it would lead to manslaughter, does it?"

"Might be a connection. If somebody figured he could grab control by putting the Line on the rocks first."

Hurlihan's face puckered. "You suspect someone *in* the company of deliberately . . ." his voice trailed off.

"We have reason to believe the killer knew short-wave radio. Most likely way to communicate with the U-boats. The *Seavett* has a ship-to-ship set. Gjersten was on the yacht. So was Merrill Ovett. So were you."

"Well!" The superintendent took off his hat, wiped off the sweat-band. "You don't add that up and make a spy case out of it. Or a murder case. Everybody in the shipping business uses short-wave. Or used to. I had a set in my office; I turned it over to the Navy. What does that make me?"

"If I knew all the answers, I wouldn't be asking questions."

MOISTURE streamed down the superintendent's face; more than could be accounted for by the mist. "Dammit, we aren't the only company losing vessels. We've had some rotten breaks, but that doesn't mean anything except that our management is dead on its feet—"

"I heard that record. Turn it over. Tell me how a man could discover when one of your ships is going out? This one, for instance?" He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the freighter.

"He might be tipped off by someone who's on a hatch-crew; they know when the *Pobrico's* supposed to be loaded. Or someone connected with the longshoremen's union, who'd hear about it when the men reported for new jobs."

"But they wouldn't know which route the ship was going to take?"

"Only way anyone could find that out would be to get into my office, study the location chart."

"What's the location chart? To show the position of your ships?"

"Every bottom we own or charter. Where they're supposed to be every minute, day or night. But no one's allowed in my office. It's always locked when

I'm not there. Nobody can get near the pier shed without being checked, double-checked and vouchered, these days."

"Merrill ever go in there?"

"He might." Hurlihan looked out past the freighter at the river, a sluggish, leaden stream under the glare of the loading lights. "He worked there for a couple of months, few years ago."

"Still have a key, does he?"

"Don't know. Some of the Line officials have. But anybody else would have to run the gantlet of our guards, the customs men, and the pier patrolmen."

"Let's have a peek at this location thing."

The superintendent's office was locked. Hurlihan used a key chained to his belt, pushed open a heavy steel door, let Koski into a long, narrow room at the end of the shed. From its window Koski could see out over the well-deck of the freighter. Light streamed up out of the hold, silhouetting men of the forward hatch gang—black gnomes against a yellow inferno. One of the explosive drums swung up over the side, hovered, spun slowly as it descended. The Harbor Squad man heard Hurlihan expel his breath in a long sigh.

The superintendent turned to a jumbo chart of the North Atlantic which covered one wall from floor to ceiling; the chart was covered with transparent plastic, which bore the greasy markings of colored crayons. Inch-long miniatures of steamships were sprinkled along the route north past Nova Scotia and Iceland; they bore markings: *Santa Inez*, *Santa Felice*, *Santa Rosario*. . .

On the long bare table in front of the chart were other miniatures, mounted on small, painted metal disks. One was labeled *Santa Pobrico*. Hurlihan picked it up, touched it to the cellophane. It clung to the chart just outside Ambrose Light-ship off New York Harbor. "Sheet of zinc underneath the chart; it's electrically magnetized so these widgets stick where we put them. Unless a torpedo knocks them off." He touched the miniature of the *Pobrico*. "If you don't stymie me, this is where she'll be by nine o'clock tomorrow night."

Koski nudged the ship-cymbol gently along on the chart a couple of inches.

"What're the red marks for, f'r instance?"

"Where we lost a ship."

"What about the blue crosses?"

"Attacks."

Koski saw a blue X a little below and to the right of Cape Hatteras. Beside it was printed in green ink: *Santa Mercedes*.

"This the last one you lost, Hurlihan?"

"Yeah. One of my pals went down with that—the first officer. He wasn't as lucky as Merrill."

Koski didn't act as if it was news. "The old man's son been on any other Ovett ships that have been torpedoed . . . besides the *Mercedes*?"

"Search me. If I knew what alias he used, I could find out from the log-files." The superintendent couldn't keep his attention away from the window; he was listening to the detective with a mixture of impatience and anxiety. "But you couldn't suspect a man who actually sailed on board a ship that was sunk, anyway."

"Couldn't I?" Koski's jaw jutted. "The sort of slug who'd tip off a sub-commander about a ship's sailing might be able to fix it so he wouldn't be among those missing after she went down." He tapped Hurlihan on the chest with rigid fingers. "We've had it straight from the feed-box that young Ovett's planning to ship out of the harbor today. If he goes out on your T.N. Tanker, you'll have a hell of a lot of explaining to do, mister. Better make good and damned sure he doesn't!"

XIII

A COLD WIND WHINED across the Hudson; at the bulkhead between Piers Eight and Nine, the *Vigilant* was drenched with fine chill spray that snaked down the windows of the pilot-house in rivulets like mineral oil.

Mulcahey was asleep on his feet, chocked off between the wheel and the shelf for flares and binoculars. Koski jerked at the siren cord hanging down from the cabin-top; a hoarse blast shuddered through the night. The Sergeant grabbed for his gun before he got his eyes open.

"Steady as she goes, Irish."

"Was that you, blasting?"

"You must have heard the echo of your own snores."

The Sergeant rubbed the sleep out of

his face, looked at the clock on the instrument panel. "Has that thing stopped? Or is it quarter to four?"

"If you had a refreshing rest, chum—" Koski turned on the ignition key. "Let us then be up and doing."

"Hark to the man. Have you no respect for your own constitution? The human system needs a little shuteye at regular intervals. Or are you an exemption to the rule?"

"How would we get anywhere on this job if we stuck to the eight-hour tours, Irish? I understand these *untersee-boot* men put in sixteen hours at a clip."

"'Tis an inhuman system any way you look at it. And none of the Mulcaheys are iron men. Personally, I am more apt to be on my toes if I am able to accumulate a little slumber instead of being shuffled around from pillow to post by day and by night."

"When we get to the Basin you can work in some blanket drill. Was there anything you forgot to remember on the short-wave, this time?"

"Nothing but dimout warnings plus an alarm from a couple of lugs who broke into a ration board office and snuk off with an armful of gas coupons." The Sergeant relaxed into moody silence.

When the patrol-boat touched the float at the Battery, Koski clambered out stiffly. "You're on your own, Rip Van Winkle. I'll be prowling."

Mulcahey stretched out in the cockpit, a life jacket under his head, a slicker over him. "I wouldn't want you to think I was laying down on the job. . . ."

"Sall right, Joe. If I need you, I'll buzz one of the boys to come over from the Pier and set off a depth charge." He wandered across the park, up Greenwich Avenue to an all-night lunchroom.

There were a dozen men eating at the counter, a few more gathered around a pin-ball machine in one corner. A short-order cook was dipping a wire basket of french-fried potatoes out of a kettle of fat. Over his head was a yard-high poster in vivid blues and greens; a haggard sailor clinging to a wave-washed life-raft on a stormy sea. ANOTHER VICTIM OF SABOTAGE, the white cut-out letters announced. At the bottom in giant block lettering:

THE WALLS HAVE EARS

Koski forked his legs over a hard stool, said: "Scramble two, bacon, butter toast and a cup of old black joe." He wasn't hungry, but that rib might quiet down if he filled his stomach a little.

Snatches of talk came through the clatter of dishes, the ringing of the cash register, the scuffling of feet.

"... so the way they work it now, the decoy sub uses its blinker to signal the letter P, which means 'Show your Lights,' an', of course, if she shows her lights they get a good target an' blammo! There's another good ship gone. So they's strict orders for nobody to show lights at all. . . ."

Koski fiddled with his water glass, the salt-and-pepper shakers, tried to make some order out of the confusion of the last few hours. He wasn't so sure, now, that the body had been hacked to pieces to hide its identity; the dismemberment might have been simply so the murderer could carry his victim out of the Bar-Nothing hotel without attracting attention. It couldn't all have gone in the suitcase—unless the killer had made two trips, leaving part of the corpse in the room while he disposed of the rest. But that would have meant running the heavy risk of having Dora come in the room during his absence, and raising an alarm.

MORE LIKELY the man with the bandaged face had some other container in which to remove the limbs, and the head; perhaps a sailor's sea-bag which could have been carried into the hotel in the suitcase when he first went in. The point that puzzled Koski was why the murderer had bothered to lug the valise all the way over to South Street, on the Manhattan shore, instead of merely dumping the remains in the water at Erie Basin or the Gowanus. Every minute he'd have that incriminating suitcase in his possession, his danger would increase. There was no way to gauge how long he had held on to it after leaving Dommy's place; it might have taken him a good part of the night to cut it up, pack it away, remove his traces in Room Five. He hadn't managed to dispose of the torso until six the next morning if the Gurlid kid was to be believed.

"... makes seven trips over an' back

without so much as sighting a pig-boat. The night she gets in this last time there's a blitz and she goes down at her dock with half the crew on hospital list . . ."

Koski dug into the bacon and eggs. Another item that rankled in the back of his mind was the way Barbara Oveti had received the news of the butchery. She hadn't been surprised, not even shocked at the brutality of the crime. Assuming that she had been on more or less intimate terms with the victim, that offhand manner of hers gave Koski an unpleasant sensation along his spine. Both Hurlihan and Cardiff had been jolted by the news of the mutilation. But Mrs. Merrill Oveti hadn't batted an eye.

" . . . some Berlin professor, yeah. Trying to goose up morale, the stupe. Tells the German women it ain't no harm if their soldiers lose an arm or a couple legs. Be just as good men as ever. After the war, little Adolf will fix it so's there are special jobs for all them minus a limb. Even the ones who lose both hands will find what he calls useful employment. How can people fall for crap like that!"

Koski stoked his corn-cob and wondered about that wire from Sinbad. The message-to-Garcia might have meant nothing more than Ellen Wyatt had explained;—on the other hand, this was a queer time for anyone connected with the merchant marine to be sending cryptic references about messages to anybody.

One conclusion from the telegram was obvious:—if Merrill Oveti was shipping out of the country,—and Berger had predicted he might,—then time was running out fast, if Koski was going to do anything about it. BEFORE I TAKE OFF TOMORROW. Tomorrow was today now. But there wouldn't be more than four or five freighters clearing from the harbor in any one day; it shouldn't be too difficult for the Coast Guard to send men aboard those ships and check on the crews. Koski would take care of that.

He paid his check, made his way across-town in the gray shadows of false dawn. Porters scrubbed at plate-glass windows, trucks began to rumble through the streets; there was a clean, washed smell in the air.

South Street was awake. Peddlers trudged toward Brooklyn Bridge, shoving hand-trucks piled high with haddock, mack-

erel, cod. A couple of men set up iron frames and Danger warnings on either side of a manhole. Smoke eddied lazily from the stovepipes of the moored barges.

Herbie Gurlid saw him coming. "The cop, pa! The Lieutenant!" He stood at attention, saluted.

The bargeman emerged, lather on his chin, an old-fashioned razor in his hand. "Top of the morning."

"Same." Koski halted on the stringpiece of the pier. "Hear anything more on that suitcase?"

Gurlid flicked soap off the blade. "No. Nor I ain't anxious to hear nothing more about it, either. I thought the Missus was never going to get them kids to sleep last night." He massaged his chin, gloomily. "That stuff about Dot's seeing the man who chucked the bag in the water, I come to the conclusion that's a lot of bushwah."

"Why?"

"Them officers from the police station was over here for a couple hours, asking around if anybody'd seen a guy with a suitcase on the dock. Nobody had. So I guess it was a lot of bushwah. If you cops can't find anyone who saw this mysterious mugg, it's prob'ly just something Dot made up."

"She saw him all right. I've been talking to someone else who saw him, too. You keep your eyes open for him."

"How the hell can I be on the lookout for him!" The bargeman scowled. "I'll be away the day long trying to make a dollar. And my wife and kids here without no protection from a madman like that."

"Don't run a fever." Koski glanced at the two men puttering around the manhole; one or the other would be on the job until the man with the bandaged head was found. "Your family'll be looked after. There are a hell of a lot of people interested in getting hold of this particular gent."

XIV

THE EXECUTIVE Director of the Oveti Shipping Corporation was hunched over a flat-top in his corner office on the nineteenth floor. He scowled at a notice of increased maritime insurance rates in *Barron's Weekly*, threw the paper down, gazed out his Whitehall Street windows at the panorama of the Upper Bay,—

Staten Island and the Narrows in the mid-distance, the smoky outline of the Highlands blue-gray against the horizon. His office door burst open.

"Blast you to eternity, Rolf." Lawford Overt's voice was the harsh monotone of the aging deaf. "Why'n't you tell me that crazy son of mine was back in town!"

Berger made a soothing gesture. "I didn't know it, myself, until last night, after you were asleep. I meant to call you, later. Didn't expect you to come in today. How you feel this morning?"

"Like the wrath of God." Overt slammed the door; the glass rattled in the panel. "Groggy as if I'd been on an opium jag. I took that dope to give me a good night's rest. So at half past eight the maid waked me up. I've been walking around in a trance for the last hour."

Berger snorted. "Didn't the doctor tell the maid to let you sleep it off?"

"Of course he did. But she didn't know what else to do. Merrill was calling."

"Merrill?" The Director's eyes narrowed; he fumbled distractedly in his vest for a cigar. "Where is he? In town?"

"In Brooklyn somewhere. A saloon, by the noise. I could hardly make out what he was saying, I was so woozy. Still am. Lord." Overt pressed fingertips to his temples, slumped in a chair beneath the heavy gilt frame of a portrait. Against a background of blue and white sails, the painter had fixed in oils a weathered sea-captain; glacial eyes stared boldly from a face wind-polished to the russet of old spars; a bifurcated beard hung down from either side of his chin like dripping icicles.

"What'd he have to say for himself?"

"Nothing." Overt sucked at his upper plate, gloomily. "Pup couldn't spare time for anything more than 'Hello . . . don't worry about me . . . good-by.'"

"'Good-by'?" Berger snapped his lighter absently, let it burn without bringing it near his panetela. "'Good-by'! He's signed on for another voyage?" He fanned the flame before the cigar, blew out a cone of smoke, sighing.

"He has." Overt made a clicking sound with his dental equipment. "If I knew what ship, I'd damned well make sure he *didn't* sail." He leaned forward, pointed a bony forefinger. "There's something almighty queer about his turning up like this.

He said he was going in a convoy. To Russia, he expected. I didn't look for him to be back for another month."

"I thought there was a possibility of it." Berger let smoke curl out of the corner of his mouth, squinted one eye. "I hesitated to tell you. . . ."

"By the Lord Harry!" Overt's eyes burned yellowly in gaunt sockets. "Am I always the last one to know his doings?"

"I thought it would make you uneasy, Lawford."

"Don't you think I'm uneasy enough wondering every minute of the day where he is, whether his ship's been sunk under him!"

"That's why I didn't let you know. I wasn't sure he was alive. You see, his ship *was* sunk."

Overt cupped a hand to his right ear. "*What? What ship?*"

"The *Mercede*." Berger made a ceremony of tapping the ash off his cigar. "The Navy Department didn't release the list of survivors until day before yesterday. Merrill's name wasn't on it. But I knew he'd sailed on her, so—"

OVERT came to his feet; he raised thin arms over his head, shook his fists at the ceiling. "By all that's holy! All of you act around here as if I were dead and buried. I give strict instructions the boy isn't to be permitted on any ship that flies our house-flag. Now I find out you've countermanded my orders."

"Your instructions were passed on to all our masters. But not all of them know Merrill by sight; I can't personally go over every crew with a fine-toothed comb. He signed on under an assumed name. I didn't learn about it until after the *Mercede* was four days out of the assembly port. Then it was too late." Berger drummed on the desk with a letter opener. "Soon as we had word she'd been torpedoed, I did my best to learn if he'd been among the rescued. But you can't get any damned co-operation from the Navy in a case like that. It wasn't until day before yesterday I had a wire from our first mate in Charleston, saying Merrill was safe."

"Why didn't you tell me then?"

Berger let the letter opener clatter to the desk. "His name wasn't on the Navy's list of survivors, I tell you. I was afraid there

might have been a mistake in the wire. Besides, I expected Merrill to let you know, himself." A buzzer purred at his side; he picked up a hand-set, listened, murmured "Not in. Later." hung up. "That is, Lawford, if he wanted you to know he'd gone contrary to your wishes about sailing in one of our ships."

Ovett pinched with thumb and forefinger at the corners of his eyes. "But the *Mercede* wasn't bound for Russia in the first place. Why did he have to lie. . . ."

"She was scheduled for Murmansk. At the last minute the masterminds in Washington decided she'd have to carry her cargo of machinery to Rio instead, in order to be able to pick up bauxite in Paramaribo on the return."

The old man put his hands flat on the glass top of the desk, leaned over until his face was close to Berger's. "He got away with it that time. He was lucky. One fine day he's not going to be so lucky."

"Merrill's not the only man taking chances in this war."

"He's the only son I have. I don't propose to lose him if I can prevent it. You've got to help me stop him from shipping out again."

"I don't know what ship he's signed on," Berger spat out a loose bit of tobacco. "I don't know how to find out."

The office door opened quietly; Koski said "Morning."

Ovett swiveled around. "Who the devil—"

Berger broke in, swiftly. "This is a private conference, sir."

Koski shut the door softly behind him. "Don't mind me. You're probably talking about the same thing I came to see you about. Keep punching."

"You're mistaken, sir." Berger was incensed. "Mister Ovett and I were discussing a business matter. I told the girl I'd see you later." He put an arm around Ovett's shoulder, steered the older man toward the door. "If you'll excuse us—I'll be with you in a minute."

Koski didn't budge. "Don't bother with the runaround. Mister Ovett ought to know we're scouring the harbor for his son."

"What?" Ovett put one hand back of his ear again. "You're doing what?"

"Doing just what you want, Lawford."

Berger shrugged, wagged his head in annoyance. "Trying to keep Merrill from sailing. Lieutenant Koski's from the police."

THE DETECTIVE leaned back against the door. "The Coast Guard is checking every ship that clears the port. But Mister Berger mentioned last night something about your son's sailing under an assumed name. That's why I'm here. To find out what name."

Berger said: "I don't know."

Ovett fingered tremulous lips, his voice was shrill: "Why are you hunting for my son?"

Koski waited, inspected the sea-captain's portrait.

"Don't excite yourself, Lawford." The Director searched for words. "The authorities have no proof Merrill's done anything. That engineer on your yacht, what's his name. . . .?"

"Gjersten," Koski put in. He discovered that by holding his hand up over the sea-captain's beard, the portrait was a very fair replica of the life study Ellen Wyatt had made of the lookout.

"Gjersten's been found dead," Berger went on. "Merrill was on the yacht about the time the engineer must have been killed. The police are putting two and two together and getting six, as usual."

Koski examined a gold-leafed strip at the bottom of the picture frame, read *Victor Stanley Ovett* and beneath, in smaller letters, *Founder of the Line*.

Ovett's shoulders drooped, his eyes were dull coals under the shaggy brows. He slumped into the chair.

The Director went to him. "Lieutenant Koski came to your apartment last night; I told him then there was a mistake,—Merrill wasn't the sort to run away if he'd done anything to be ashamed of. He was trying to tell you the same thing on the phone, Lawford. Not to worry, things will come out all right."

"On the phone?" Koski asked. "When did he phone?"

"This morning," Ovett mumbled. "To say . . . good-by." His head began to jerk from side to side, spasmodically; his fingers twitched; his lips worked pathetically.

Berger got around back of him, put his hands under the old man's armpits. "Help

me with him, Lieutenant. Has to lie down when he gets one of these attacks."

They lifted him, walked him between them into the adjoining office, stretched him out on a brown leather sofa.

"Be all right . . . few minutes." Overtt shuddered, his head rolled loosely. "Call . . . Doctor."

Koski stood by the window while Berger used the phone. The morning sun came out from behind a cloud, slanting a dusty shaft across the model of a full-rigged ship on a stand beside the window, glittering on silvered wire and glass spools on the sill outside. Below, he could see the headquarters of the Marine Division at Pier A; the stubby black hull of the *Vigilant* beside the slate gray of a Navy launch; the arc of the Battery, the ferry terminals. Beyond, the Hudson was a brooch of sparkling brilliants against lapis lazuli. A gray two-stacked minesweeper moved slowly down past the smoke of the factory chimneys on the Jersey shore; gulls dived in the ripples of the wake. Those same gulls might have been foraging at Governors Island not many hours ago; might still be discovering bits of carrion elsewhere in the harbor. . . .

"Doctor'll be here in ten minutes." Berger motioned to the Harbor Squad man. "Just take it easy, Lawford. I'll leave the door open." He went back to his own office, muttering: "I warned you this might happen."

"Yair. Had to do it. Best way to do it is the surgeon's way. Quick and clean. Hurts more at the beginning. Less later." Koski followed him. "Where was young Overtt when he phoned?"

"Lawford didn't know. Saloon in Brooklyn, Merrill told him."

"That narrows it down. Anyone around here besides his father who was close to Merrill?"

"Hurlihan used to see a good deal of both Merrill . . . and his wife," Berger mused. "That was before Clem had delusions of grandeur; thought he could take the company out of the hands of men who have authority because they know how to use it."

"Hurlihan's fiddling around with a reorganization, isn't he? Planning to put himself in your place?"

"My place! By George, I'll put that trickster in *his* place and rub his nose in it."

Berger raised his voice. "Don't talk about replacing me; I've been doing my best to quit for three long years. If it hadn't been for Lawford's ill health and that rattle-brained son of his, I'd be raising *blooded* stock over in the Jersey hills today instead of watching stock being manipulated by men who never sailed over as much salt water in their lives as I've rung out of my pant leg!"

HIS FACE was apple-shiny with perspiration. "I am the operating head of the company only. But—I *operate* it. They'd better not interfere with me. I'm not one of that stock-juggling crowd. I own ten shares. I want no more. Or any bilge from underlings who talk one way in the front office and use another tone of voice when they're making undercover deals with union organizers."

"Meaning Hurlihan?"

"I don't mince my words. Clem Hurlihan and that underhanded Joslin."

"Joslin? Which Joslin's that?"

"I don't know his name. . . ."

"He the union man you mentioned?"

"Yes. Calls himself an organizer for the International Longshoremen's Association. He's a disorganizer, a filthy rotten bolshevik who's raised more hell with our loading costs—" He glared, apoplectically. "And Lawford's boy has to associate with that kind of riffraff. By the Lord I wish he'd been with his father and me at the Council Sunday. He'd have heard a thing or two about union organizers who wangle their way into the confidence of shipowners' sons,—and then go behind the owner's back to make a shady deal with some crooked superintendent."

"Hurlihan and this Joslin been getting chummy?"

"What else would you call putting their heads together over breakfast?"

"Where was this?"

"In the coffee room of the Sulgrave Hotel."

"When?"

"Sunday morning. A member of the Council saw them, wanted to know why Hurlihan was on such close terms with the worst agitator on the water front." Berger smacked his right fist into his left palm, stood stiffly erect. "I couldn't tell him. I don't keep tabs on our men outside of busi-

ness hours. It may not be of interest to you to know that these two have been conning Merrill along, but all the time working against his interests—"

"Yair. It's of interest. Mind?" Koski reached for the phone. To the operator on the PBX he said: "Get me Whitehall 4-1760 . . . hello, Johnny . . . Koski here . . . I want the low on a guy named Joslin . . . initial would likely be T . . . T for Tim . . . organizer for ILA . . . yair, . . . address, description, the works . . . and shoot it fast."

O'Malley said: "Okeydoke, Lieutenant. Message here for you."

"Come ahead."

"They picked up that Claire Purdo in Brooklyn. . . ."

"Where at?"

"She's in durance vile at the Eighty-second precinct. Awaiting your kind attention."

"Won't keep her waiting long. Tell Mulcahey to cast off. I'll make a pier-head jump."

XV

CLAIRE PURDO was thin and nervous; there was a little ring of cigarette stubs on the ash-tray beside her chair in the matron's room by the time Koski got there. She dabbed at the pit of her palms with a fragment of handkerchief; her forehead, under the brim of the cocky little red hat, was damp with apprehension as the Lieutenant came in and sat on the edge of the matron's cot.

"If you're going to send me to the Island," she burst out, "why don't you do it, instead of keeping me in here as if I'd committed some crime!"

Koski said: "We're after something more important than a soliciting conviction, sister." He sized up the cheap suit, a little too large for her slender figure; the imitation fox scarf around her scrawny neck. According to the detention record, she was twenty-eight, but her features were those of the frightened adolescent. "Where'd you spend the night, if it isn't too personal?"

"With a friend."

"I asked where. Not how."

"In Bay Ridge."

"Skip the stall." He held out his hand,

palm up. "I'm no vice sniffer. I want the low. I want it quick. Unless you don't mind getting mixed up in a homicide tangle, you'll give out, fast."

"Homicide!"

"Over at Big Dommy's. Sunday night."

She lit a cigarette; her hands were shaky. "I don't know anything—"

"Maybe you think you don't. Just answer my questions. I'll find out whether you do or not. Now, about last night?"

"I was at my cousin Amy's. Rannet Street. Number Eighty-seven Rannet."

"Keep pedaling . . ." He made a note of the address.

"Amy's husband's in the Army. She's working over at the Flexileather plant, on a cutter. They make these Sam Browne belts for the officers and she can't afford to stay away from the shop. But her baby's got bronchitis or something the matter with his chest, so—"

"You sat up with the kid?"

"Yes." Tears came into her eyes. "Now you'll go and ask her and tell her what . . . how I make my living . . ."

"Cut the sobs." Koski was gruff. "You don't see any tattle-tale gray on me, do you? Now about Sunday. You picked up a sailor somewhere along in the afternoon?"

She waited, wide-eyed.

"Don't go into the silences, sister. Was that the first time you'd seen this guy?"

"No. The second."

"What'd he look like?"

She'd only taken a couple of puffs on her cigarette, but she stubbed it out. "He's a squarehead, I guess. A Swede or something like that. He has black eyes."

"Know his name?"

"Ansel something. He works on a yacht, he told me."

"He used to."

"Oh!" Claire seemed to be sick. "Was he the one . . . ?"

"There was another man up there in Room Five."

"No." She squeezed her palms together, wretchedly. "No one else."

"Yair. Another guy. Big guy. Bandage around his face. You must have seen him."

"I didn't. Honest, I didn't."

"Friend of Ansel's, maybe."

"There wasn't anyone. Not that I saw."

"Get it right, babe. This is serious. There's a hot rocking chair at the end of the road for somebody. You could file yourself in the cooler for a good, long spell if you're dumber up on me."

"I'm not. I didn't see anyone." She sniffled, miserably.

"What time'd you leave Ansel?"

"I guess I was there maybe half an hour." She licked a finger, moistened a thread on her nylon. "He told me he'd be there later, but he wasn't."

"Wanted to play a return engagement?"

"No." She pulled the scarf around her shoulders, shivered. "He gave me something . . . to pawn. I told him I knew a place that was open Sunday nights sometimes. But I . . . I thought it over and decided maybe he didn't have any right to give it to me and maybe I'd get in trouble if the clock happened to be stolen. So I took it back to Dommy's. But Ansel wasn't there."

"He might have been there. What kind of a clock was this?"

"Oh, it's beautiful. It must have cost a lot of money. It's gold and there are little enameled animals on it. A lion, a bull, a fish of some kind . . . that's why I was afraid to hock it,—because it didn't seem like the sort of thing Ansel would have . . . have had in his family. He told me his grandfather left it to him and he'd never wanted to sell it but now he needed money." She smiled, sadly. "I kind of thought maybe he was lying about it."

"You were kind of right. So you took the ticker back to Dommy's. But Ansel didn't show? That it?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you go up to Room Five to see if he was still there?"

"I did. But there was someone else in the room."

"Now you're clicking. What did this other gent look like?"

SHE SEEMED distressed. "I didn't hardly see him at all. He only opened the door an inch or so,—and the room was dark inside."

Koski stood up, cursing silently. Another false alarm. This girl wouldn't be able to identify Bandage Face, unless . . .

"Think you'd be able to recognize his

voice, if you heard it again?"

"I . . . I don't know. Maybe." Claire shrank back. "Did he . . . kill Ansel?"

"Chances are he's the murderer, yair. What'd you do with this trinket your sailor-friend left you?"

"It's in my room. Wrapped in the towel. Just the way he gave it to me. I'm so sorry for Ansel . . ."

He caught her arm. "Let's hit the grit. I'd like a gander at this timepiece."

Out at the main desk he told the sergeant to cross her off the detention list; if the prosecution needed her as a material witness, he'd know where to find her.

Treanor Place was noisy with push-cart peddlers, children playing in the gutters; the tenements were decorated with blankets and sheets hung out of the windows for airing.

She went up the stairs ahead of him. "You're not going to take me in for receiving stolen property, are you? Because I didn't know it was stolen, for sure . . ."

"Unlax, babe. We got other things to keep us humping."

She put the key in the lock. "I haven't had a chance to red' up the room," she opened the door, "on account of Amy called me—"

The bark of a gun punctuated her sentence. She screamed, toppled forward into the room. The door slammed in Koski's face as he lunged for the knob. The pistol roared again, inside the room. A splinter of wood hinged out from the paneling next the jamb. The Harbor Squad man flung himself to one side, tugging out his service-special.

He stepped out, kicked at the knob. The door crashed back on its hinges. Claire Purdo lay on her face with one hand clawing feebly at the dingy matting on the floor. He bent down. There was a hole in her throat he could have put his thumb in. She couldn't live.

There was no one else in the room. At the left, a window was open. Outside, the rusty railing of a fire escape.

Koski got to it, looked down. Two floors below a gray-haired woman looked up, shouted: "There he is!"

The Lieutenant piled through the window, onto the grating, sprinted up. There wasn't anyone on the roof. He ran to the coping, blew on his whistle. He watched

the front door of the tenement,—but no one came out except a woman wheeling a baby carriage. Koski wouldn't have dared to shoot down into that crowded alley, anyway. He gave the three blasts on his whistle again, heard an answering shrill. A bluecoat pounded along from the avenue. Koski waved, pointed down to the tenement entrance. Then he went back down the fire escape.

The prostitute had managed to squirm over on her side. The matting beside her head was a blotch of scarlet. The bullet had torn through her throat and out at the back of her neck. The fur scarf was sodden.

There wasn't a prayer of saving her. If she lived long enough to make an *in extremis* statement, it would be more than Koski expected.

He knelt down. "Who was it, kid? Who shot you?"

Her fingers tried to press against the wound under her jaw. She made a desperate effort to speak.

All Koski heard was the death rattle.

XVI

MULCAHEY slushed down the fore-deck in his bare feet, coveralls rolled up to the knees. He waved his mop as Koski called across the Gowanus wharf. "Shove off, Sarge. On our way."

"You look like you lost your best friend, Steve. Or is it the rib which is floating too free?"

"I lost a good witness." Koski let himself down carefully to the cockpit, set a bundle on the transom locker. "Claire Purdo got a one-way ticket about ten minutes ago."

"Who punched it for her?"

"Same party who's responsible for most of the manslaughter. Person or persons unknown. I'm as guilty as anybody, Irish."

The Sergeant raced the motor, cast off. "In what way, now?" The *Vigilant* rumbled out into the canal.

"I was taking her to her room for this," Koski unwrapped the bundle. "I let her go in first. When she unlocked the door, someone hiding inside put a bullet through her throat."

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"This Bandage Face, was it?"

"No see, Irish." Koski held the clock up with its towel wrapping protecting the prints. "The killer got away up the fire escape. I should have searched her room before she went in. I must be slipping."

"You still have a ways to go," Mulcahey held the wheel with one hand, dried his feet on an old shirt with the other, "before you are down to average. Did the poor kid recognize who bumped her?"

"I wish to God I knew. But she didn't make any *in extremis* statement; she took the slug in the throat; died in a couple of minutes."

"Rest her soul. How did the scut get inside her room?"

"Picked the lock, unless he had a key."

"He seems to be handy at odd jobs. What in the name of Bulova is that monstrosity?"

"Astrological clock." Koski weighed the clock on his palm. "Runs by electricity. Supposed to tell you the star influences of the moment. Gjersten gave it to the Purdo babe to hock. He probably stole it from that hotcha on the yacht."

Mulcahey made a notation in the police-boat log. "We are rolling at exactly," he eyed the clock, "half past scorpion. Speed, ten knots. Weather, but lousy. Destination . . . ?"

"Drop the timepiece off at the Basin. Then run up to the Fourteenth Street docks."

"Ah, now, me lad! You will not be telling me off for some chore which will cut into my accustomed period of relaxation! Because at eight this eve I have an arrangement to bask in the wiles of a certain toothsome frill. And you put a dent in my favorite recreation last night, making me labor over-hours."

"Recreate after we get this cleaned up. You know your way around the long-shoremen's hiring hall, up at Fourteenth?"

"'Tis my old parish, sure."

"Kayo. Hop over there. Collar on to a mugg by the name of Tim Joslin. If he's in. Works for the union. Age about thirty-five. Five ten. Weighs around hundred and eighty. Thin, sandy hair. Watch your footwork. If I gauge him right, he'd be a mean hand with a cargo hook."

"Would he be the lad with his jaw in a sling?"

"How do I know!" Koski gritted his teeth as he straightened up. "His name was on Dommy's hotel register. He knows Merrill Ovet. He sees a lot of guys who go down to the sea in ships. Maybe he knows a thing or two about sailing dates. I'd crave to hold converse with him."

"If he's there, I'll have him for you. Hot or cold."

"Wait until I check off at the Basin. Maybe I'll have him first; if the boys at the precinct have located his hangout."

He put one foot up on the gunwale, gazed through the gray screen of rain at the downtown skyline. Up to about the tenth story, all the massive buildings on Manhattan's tip were visible; above that they were veiled in smoky cloud. There was, he reflected sardonically, a certain parallel between this hazy view across the bay and what he knew about the killer he was hunting.

Part of it was plain enough; the murderer was cold-blooded enough to dissect a man he'd just slaughtered; ruthless enough to blast the life out of a poor prostitute who at best could only have been a witness against him. And quite possibly he was treacherous enough to be an agent for the funneling of ship-information to the slinking pig-boats that lurked off the twenty-fathom line . . .

WHEN THEY touched at the headquarters pier, Koski hustled through the dark tunnel under the building, stepped into his office. Johnny O'Malley was hammering out a report on the Remington.

"Run this over to Ident, Johnny." He laid the clock on his desk. "What'd you get on Joslin?"

"Guy is a shifter, Lieutenant. Now you see him, now you don't. Dozen addresses in a year. Present habitat, Nineteen Swamp Street. Kind of guy everybody knows . . . and either hates or goes for in a big way. A positive personality, according to hearsay."

"Old Pathé O'Malley. Sees all, knows all. Anything come in on young Ovet?"

"Miscues, is all. He doesn't show up at the South Street sail-loft. But he's reported picked up in Union City while applying for a job as a ferry gateman.

Slight mistake. It was two other guys from Buffalo. Then he's positively identified as a passenger on an airliner from LaGuardia Field to Washington. Turns out the gent is an attaché of the Brazilian consulate."

"We better run something besides rumors to ground, I'm telling you. Time is fugiting too damned fast."

He hurried back to the patrol-boat; Mulcahey was gassing up at the Department pump. "Shoot me up to Washington Market, Sarge. I might get my hands on that hunk of beef we're looking for. He has a domicile on Swamp Street."

The *Vigilant* avoided a car-float, shaved the ends of the piers, northward, to keep out of the strength of the tide. Mulcahey grazed her up against the market dock just long enough for Koski to step off. The police-boat had disappeared behind the curtain of rain before Koski reached the pier shed.

He strode east through the warehouse district. The smells of onions, spices, coffee were as tangible as the steam from the tugs bustling about on the river.

There didn't seem to be any Number Nineteen. Seventeen was the *Haven Pool Parlor*; Twenty-three was a secondhand machinery salesroom, deserted. There was nothing in between. A narrow flight of stairs climbed steeply beside the poolroom door. He tried the stairs.

On the floor above the Haven were four doors with scabrous paint, an iron sink and faucet. No names, no numbers. Two of the doors were unlocked; he peered into rooms gray with dust lighted by windows crusted with gray grime. At one of the other doors he listened, heard nothing but the click of balls and an argumentative voice from the poolroom below. When he put his ear to the last door, the knob began to turn slowly and noiselessly. He put his palm along the jamb, threw his weight against it, suddenly.

The man Koski had seen at Ellen Wyatt's studio stumbled back into the room, nearly upsetting a table piled high with books, papers, a portable typewriter, a bottle of milk.

"Well, well." Koski moved in. "So you're the lad who didn't know anything about Merrill Ovet." He couldn't see any closet; there wasn't much clothing around.

A canvas cot was neatly made up with sheets and pillowslip; along the floor next to the table was stacked a long row of volumes. An accordion in a battered leather case occupied a broken-down washstand.

Joslin stepped to the cot, reached under it, came up with a sawed-off billiard cue. He swung the leaded end, casually. "If you're fixing to strong-arm me around, somebody's going to get hurt, gumshoe."

Koski went toward him, stiff-legged; stood with feet planted wide apart, fists on hips. He looked at the books on the table. "The word goes around you're tough stuff. Don't tell me you're a brow, too." He picked up three volumes: *Theory of the Leisure Class*, by Veblen; *Collected Poems*, by Masfield; *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*.

KOSKI fingered the flyleaf of the autobiography. *Merrill S. Ovet* was written in a broad staccato hand. *Portland, June, 1934*. "Where'd you get this, Joslin?"

"What's it to you? I borrowed it. You can't frame me on that."

"I'm not in the picture business, hard guy. When'd you get it from Ovet?"

"I don't recall. Long time ago. Three, four years."

"How long's it been since you've seen him?"

"Any time you blues want dope from me, get yourselves a subpoena. I'll talk to the District Attorney, maybe. Not to a lot of finks."

Koski put the books down. "You'll talk to me. Here. Or at headquarters. Suit yourself. But don't get snotty with me because some pratt from a private agency has shoved you around."

Joslin gave a sardonic "Ha!" He jabbed a stubby forefinger at the scar on his chin. "See that? A uniform cop did that to me. A dumb ox of a strike-breaking cop. I was in the hospital a week. You think I'm going to throw my arms around you just because you took a civil service exam! That's for laughs."

Koski pushed his hat back from his forehead, hooked his thumbs under his lapels. "How much you weigh?"

Joslin scowled. "Hundred and eighty-five pounds. Why?"

"Nothing much. Only you're the cocki-

est hundred eighty-five pounds I ever met. I'll cut it right off the rare end. You may be covering up for Ovet—"

"You won't get me to admit he needs covering."

"The big-hearted pal act. All right. Leave Ovet out of it, time being. There are a few little coincidences that tie you in with these murders."

"Murders." The organizer's eyes narrowed. "You told Ellen one man had been killed."

"That was so. Then. Today a girl got shot to death. Either by the same crut. Or someone working with him." Koski took a step closer. "In addition to which, there's a good chance the slob we're after has been pipelining out dope on ship clearances . . . to enemy submarines—"

Joslin gritted: "You ——!" The billiard cue swung up.

Koski crowded up against him; clutched the other's right biceps, broke the force of the swing. He jammed his forearm up under Joslin's chin, shoved the man's head back. The cue thudded on the Lieutenant's shoulder. He grapevined one leg behind the organizer, leaned on him. Joslin went backward, off balance. Koski bored in, got a wristlock on the arm holding the cue. He levered down, heard the weapon clatter to the floor. He pushed Joslin back against the wall, held him there, kicked the cue behind him, turned to one side, bent down, picked it up.

"How you want it, hardboiled? Either loosen up. Or grab your hat and hang on. Because you're going over the jumps."

Joslin edged over to the table. "You might hang me around some. But you're not going to get away with saying I'm working against the merchant marine."

"If you're not, why don't you give out, help me get the snake who is?"

THE ORGANIZER reached for the milk bottle. Koski lifted the cue, warningly. But all the other did was to thumb out the cardboard cap, put the bottle to his lips, drink. It took him ten seconds, it gave him time to think. He set the bottle down, recapped it, wiped his lips on a paper napkin that had been tucked under the bottle. Then he pulled a kitchen chair out from the table, swung it around, sat down and leaned his arms on the back.

"I can't buck you on that. How am I supposed to be involved?"

"Where were you Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening?"

"In the afternoon I was speaking to a rank-and-file meeting of the union. At the hiring hall. In the evening I was giving a concert," he waved toward the accordion, "to the essie-eyes. Seamen's Church Institute. Maybe I murdered a few pieces, but that's all."

"Plenty of people saw you? Both those places?"

"Plenty."

"Then who the hell signed your name to a register in a scummy dive over in the Jungle?"

"Somebody else—"

"Lured a man up to the room or followed him up there? Killed him?"

"—Not me."

"Cut his body up? Packed it in a suitcase? Heaved it in the drink?"

Joslin's ears began to get red. "I'd like to lay my hands on the fellow who signed my name to *that*."

"You don't know anything about any of that." Koski didn't make it a question. "All right. Let's tune in a different station. That was Sunday. This is Tuesday. Where were you about an hour ago?"

"Right here."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself. This girl you spoke of, —she was shot an hour ago?"

"Over in Brooklyn. Treanor Place. Know that section?"

"Never heard of it."

"Maybe young Ovett has." Koski walked around the room, scrutinized a Gropper cartoon pinned to the wall, a *National Geographic* map of the *Western Ocean* in colors, unfolded over the foot of the cot. "When'd you see him last?"

Joslin rummaged around the table for a stick of gum, concentrated on unwrapping it, before he answered. "Sunday noon. Just before I went over to the union meeting."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Say where he was going after he left here?"

"I suppose he was going home."

"Skip the suppositions. Didn't expect to see him again before he shipped out?"

"No."

"Hadn't figured on his wiring your girl he'd see her today?"

"Listen. You can't work up any antagonism on that score. Merrill's been a friend of Ellen's longer than I have. He introduced me to her."

"On pretty good terms with young Ovett, weren't you? Isn't usual for a union man to be pally with a shipowner's son."

"Merrill is a union man as well as a shipowner's son. That's why I like him. Any individual who can snap out of his environment enough to see the other fellow's viewpoint has a lot to him. Merrill does that; he even goes so far as to make trips on one of his father's vessels,—against the old man's orders,—to see for himself how the men are being treated."

"Under an assumed name, hah?"

"He couldn't get aboard any other way. They'd toss him off on his ear; Hurlihan practically jumped out of his socket when I told him he couldn't deny the conditions on Ovett ships any longer since an Ovett was getting a firsthand look at them himself,—and would do something about it."

"Oh! Hurlihan knew?"

"Sure. I told him, when it was too late for him to do anything except rave about it."

"Sunday morning, maybe?"

Joslin scowled. "No. I saw Hurlihan Sunday. But it was about a different matter."

"Was, eh? What name'd Merrill sign under, this last voyage?"

"Now you've got me. What difference does it make?"

"Might make a lot." Koski stacked the volumes, again. "Maybe he used T. Joslin."

The organizer smiled frostily. "That wouldn't be any passport with Hurlihan. What the hell's this got to do with the submarines, anyway?"

"O VETT line seems to have been singled out for attention by the U-boys. Merrill Ovett was sunk in one of them. Knows a lot about Ovett sailings. Ovett yacht has a short-wave sending set that could broadcast dope, if anyone could get to it who was so minded. Yacht had the inside track on Cee-Gee

activities, being an auxiliary and all."

"That doesn't spatter any mud on me."

"You work around the docks. You could find out when ships clear,—or somebody might pump you and find out. Your name was on the register for the room where the murder was committed. You talked to Ovet Sunday; that's the day he disappeared." Koski threw the billiard cue on the cot. "Let's go over to the hiring hall, find somebody who can corroborate your oratory."

Joslin put on his cap without comment, led the way downstairs.

They went along West Street. Under the pillars of the express highway, trucks ground their gears and made obscene bombilations. Along the sidewalks, in doorways of saloons, mission halls, pawnbrokers, flop-houses,—men greeted the organizer; seamen, stevedores, truck drivers, winch-men, gunners, stokers. Men, Koski knew, who loaded the fighting ships that had no armor and made ten knots in a heavy sea, men who sailed them across in spite of mines, bombers, periscopes in the dusk . . .

Joslin might have been reading his mind. "Lot of these boys have been over and back a dozen times."

"Yair. Wonder what they'd do to a guy if they found out he was setting them up for the subs to shoot at?"

The organizer only grunted.

Koski made one more attempt. "Understand young Ovet is a bug about radio. You up on that short-wave stuff, too?"

Joslin didn't look at him. "I don't know an amplifier from an aerial. If you're intending to get me to say Merrill does, go spit into the wind. I don't know any good reason why he shouldn't,—but don't try to trap me into giving his answers for him."

At the door to the hiring hall, Mulcahey was waiting. Beside him was Frankie Salderon.

The Sergeant beamed fondly at his prisoner. "Look what wriggles out from under a rock, skipper. The lad who was up in the deckhouse while you were on the yacht." He patted the Filipino on the shoulder. "Says he aims to get himself another berth. I figure maybe we could make one up for him over at the hoosegow. No?"

KOSKI said: "Frisko?" Mulcahey produced a red tobacco tin, opened it, shook out half a dozen cigarettes made of light brown paper.

The Lieutenant took one, put it to this nose. "This stuff'll make you see around corners, Frankie. Also,—" he ran deft fingers along the back of the Filipino's coat at the shoulder blades, "sometimes it gives you ideas." The steward wore no collar scabbard.

"The little roach was getting ready to take a scam, Steve. When he saw me."

"Whither away?" Koski asked.

"I have a right to go where I please." Frankie's black eyes smoldered hate. "I came here to get another job. You can't stop me."

Koski put the tin in his pocket. "Maybe we can find something to keep you busy." He gripped the Filipino's arm. "Sarge, how's for changing partners, hah?"

Mulcahey looked at Joslin. "Is he ready to go into his dance?"

"Yair. Waltz Comrade Joslin into the hall, for a checkup. Tells me he was addressing a union crowd here, Sunday afternoon. Then rhumba along with him to the Seamen's Institute. Find out if he was playing sweet music to the throng. Sunday night, he says."

"And if so be it, coach?"

"Kiss the boy good-by." He pulled at the steward's arm. "You and I will mosey over to the hoosegow, son."

"You haven't any reason to arrest me." Frankie dragged back. "Just because I want to change my job. *Leggo!*"

Mulcahey cuffed him lightly alongside the ear. "Get along, little dogie."

"Leave him alone." Joslin's face darkened; he caught the Sergeant's shoulder. "Arrest him if you want to. But don't muscle a union man around while I'm standing by!"

"HARK TO the hard guy, will you." Mulcahey clubbed a huge fist, swung a half-hearted punch. The organizer mistook the Irishman's intent, countered with a savage jab that landed flush on Mulcahey's mouth, rocking him back on his heels, toppling him over a hydrant.

Joslin whirled, darted across the street

between a fruit truck and a moving van. Koski dived toward him, but at that moment the Filipino wriggled out of his coat, sprinted away in the opposite direction. The Lieutenant went after Frankie, caught him halfway up the block. "By rights I ought to put the twisters on you, slippery. Try one more break, I'll fix you so you'll wake up smelling ether. Climb into your coat."

Mulcahey was out in the middle of the street, with his gun drawn, "See where the bugger went, Steve?"

"With the wind, Irish. Best thing's to shoot in an alarm for him. He can't keep out of sight of eighteen thousand cops for long."

"I was not looking for any such demonstration on his part." The Sergeant felt of his front teeth. "Next time I will take good care to beat him to the punch."

"Beat him to setting up an alibi,—all I ask. After you stick in the alarm, check here at the hall and at the Essie-eyes."

"He'll not put anything over on me again. Depend on that."

"Okay. Tell the Telegraph Bureau his address is Nineteen Swamp."

"I got it."

"If you still feel like chewing, pick me up at the Tavern, after you run the boat down to the Basin." Koski propelled the Filipino toward Fourteenth Street, signaled a cab.

When they were rolling toward Centre Street, Koski growled: "What makes, Frankie? Nice lady give you the bounce?"

"I quit. I have a right to quit."

"Sure. But all same kind of sudden."

The Filipino made no reply.

"Should think you'd like it better on the yacht now. With Ansel gone. You didn't buddy up with Ansel? Did you?"

"I didn't like him. But I didn't kill him." Frankie struggled, indignantly.

"Quiet down. Does Captain Cardiff know you're running out on him?"

The steward looked bored. "He sent me ashore to get supplies. I sent the supplies back. I don't intend to go back. I'll have no difficulty in finding a place."

"We'll find a place for you, all right. Where'd you push the pots and pans before you went to work on the *Seavett*?"

"On the *Polaris*." Frankie straightened his narrow, black tie, resentfully. "Mister

Fross's ketch. For the past five years."

"Oh, yair. Friend of Hurlihan's, isn't he?"

"He is Mrs. Ovett's lawyer."

"Fross recommend you for the job?"

"He lays the *Polaris* up for the winter. I was free to accept other employment."

The detective mulled it over. "Did Ansel work for Fross, too? Before he went with Mrs. Ovett?"

"Yes."

Koski said nothing more until the cab pulled up back of headquarters. "Out and in, Frankie."

"You can't arrest me without letting me telephone to my lawyer. The law says so." The Filipino nursed a patch of surgeon's tape on the back of his hand.

"You're not being arrested. Just detained. For investigation."

The steward balled his fists. "I want to call my lawyer."

"Who is he? This Fross?"

"He would take my part. Yes."

"All right. I was going to call the gent, anyway. Don't work yourself into a lather. We'll give you a nice, quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Until you hear from him."

HE MARCHED the Filipino to the booking desk, gave him into custody, signed the complaint blank. On the line: NATURE OF CHARGE, he told the desk-sergeant to write: *possession of narcotics*.

"Print him, Charley. Ask Identification to check the whorls with the negatives from that house of ill-fame in Brooklyn. With anything they might have been able to dust out of the Purdo's kid's room on Treanor Place. And anything else they've got lying around on this suitcase job."

"You wouldn't like 'em to use the comparison microscope down at the Federal Bureau, would you, Lieutenant?" The desk-officer made notations on a pad.

"They'll do that in due course, Charley. I'll be over at the Tavern, if the Inspector wants me."

He used the phone book, found Henry Sutlee Fross listed at 40 Wall Street. But he didn't find him in. The man on the switchboard said Mister Fross was in court, wouldn't be back until mid-afternoon.

It was beginning to pour when Koski crossed the thirty feet from the white stone

building to the Headquarters Tavern on Centre Market Place,—a cold, steady downfall that brought shiny black coats and dripping hats to the racks beside the café door.

Koski found a table near the window across the street from the Hole, where the patrol wagons drove up to empty their hauls. He ordered bean soup, pot roast, home-fried, red cabbage, raisin pie and coffee,—continued to gaze at the purple handwriting on the menu long after the waiter had taken his departure.

He stripped a loose end of cotton from the folded napkin beside his water tumbler. A loose end, he reflected grimly; too many of them, entirely. The *Seavett* was full of them. Why hadn't anyone seen Merrill Ovet on the trip across the river from Rodd's to the Wall Street dock? Why hadn't Barbara Ovet been more concerned about her husband's unexpected return, his sudden vanishing? What had been bothering Cardiff when he watched Koski go into Mrs. Ovet's stateroom? Was there any significance in Frankie's quick-leave?

There were other bits of unfinished business that rankled in the Lieutenant's mind. At the Bar-Nothing Ranch, for instance. How had the man with the bandaged face known his victim and the Purdo girl would be there? What knowledge was Big Dommy holding out? What had Claire Purdo known that made it necessary for her to be rubbed out?

There weren't so many doubtful angles to the Whitehall Street phase of the case, but they might be the most important of all. The son who rebelled at his father's pattern of life, his shipping out under an assumed name, the high number of sinkings of Ovet vessels, the short-wave apparatus—

He got to his feet, wandered down between the tables. Uniformed men nodded to him, plainclothesmen swung genial punches as he passed so he had to curve his body out of range in order to protect his ribs. A couple of cameramen inquired if he had any more meat in the refrigerator.

A graying inspector with a napkin tucked up under his chin called out: "I've had a councilman Cahill on my neck all morning. Says he's going to go all the way up to the top if you don't lay off Dominick."

"Some day that Greek'll short-circuit himself good."

"I told Cahill we had no control over you; you were unpredictable, erratic and we'd be glad when you put in for a pension. But we had to stand for your vagaries because you knew the secret vice of one of the mayor's cousins." He gnawed on a lamb-bone. "Cahill will probably start sucking around you, now; get you to use your inside to boost him into a soft spot at City Hall. These two-bit wire-pullers!" He mopped his mouth, grinning. "Was Dominick in that thing?"

"All the returns aren't in yet, Eddie. I'd say Dommy wouldn't be elected. Thanks."

HE STOPPED at the cigar counter long enough to read the list of *Departmental Transfers* pasted on a cardboard; edged into one of the phone booths. It took five cents and five minutes to learn that the Sixth Detective Division was blank on the subject of visitors to Ellen Wyatt's sail-loft and that the SINBAD message had been telephoned in to the Fulton Street Western Union from a coin-phone.

He got back to the table as Mulcahey came in, shaking himself. "A wild guess chase, entirely, skipper. Joslin was in the midst of admiring friends all day the Sabbath. Unless half the waterfront is committing mass perjury. Still, I will feel better when we have him in tow, again. What are you munching on?"

"Pot roast. Stop spraying the tablecloth. You're worse than a Saint Bernard after a bath."

The Sergeant examined the list of dishes. "Eels today. Juicy fried eels, praise be. And a beaker of bock, *garsong*." He felt of his lip, wincing. "Say, coach . . ."

"Say away . . ."

"Did you happen to gander at the Joslin scar? Would it be farfetched to figure a guy who wanted to commit a felony would wish to hide a marker like that? With a bandage, mayhap?"

"Some such idea did occur to me."

"It would carry weight with a jury, in my opinion."

"Why for? You could cover up a hell of a lot of things with a bandage like that."

A mustache, for instance. A beard. Or the shape of a face."

The waiter brought a tray. "Phone for you, Lieutenant."

"Thanks, Mac." He laid down his fork, went into the booth. "Koski, here."

"Nixon. Hate to spoil your repast, but I knew you'd want to know."

"Bomb away."

"Eustape Mirando, junkie, license 2714, recovered a portion of a human body from the east bank of the Gowanus Canal about three-quarters of an hour ago."

"Every little bit, added to what we've got."

"What we've got is an arm."

"Which arm?"

"Left."

"Just the very thing I wanted, Inspector. How *did* you know! Tattoo mark on the bicep?"

"Not even a vaccination mark. The upper part of the member was what the Medexam office calls severely lacerated. In other words, all chewed up to hell and gone. Done with a knife, I'd say."

"Runs to form." Koski considered. "How about the hand. Any prints?"

"We can get prints from a billiard ball. The skin's shriveled, of course. But we'll pump a little embalming fluid in the arteries and bring the lines out a little. If there's enough left of the arteries."

"Um! About the prints. When you get them, check around with the others, hah?"

Nixon made a derisive noise. "We've got a checking job that would panic a blonde at a night-club cloakroom. I've got three of my best boys glued to the eye-pieces, classifying Agaroppoulous, Purdo, Johnson,—"

"Who's he?"

"She. Dora Johnson. Colored maid at Agarappoulous' den of iniquity,—Johnson, Hurlihan, the shots from Room Five at the Bar-Nothing, from the Purdo place, the Wyatt studio, Merrill Ovet's apartment and God knows what."

"Add one minor item. A Filipino by the name of Frankie Salderon. Frankie's in a pew at the Tombs. Much oblige."

He went back to the table. "How're the eels, Sarge?"

"A dish for the duke, no less." He lifted his glass.

"ATTABOY." Koski drained his coffee, standing. "They found an arm. In the Gowanus. Seems to go with the rest of the jig-saw. Whoever tossed it into the canal made sure we wouldn't see any tattooing on it, though. It was a busy day with the knife."

"What did the dirty ripper do? Row around the harbor to scatter the pieces far and wide?"

"Tide might carry a leg out of the Gowanus to Governors, caught it just right. Arm was probably dumped in with it. One drifted; the other stuck in the mud. We might have to dredge a bit. For the rest of him."

The Sergeant wiped foam off his lips. "I knew I should not of put them grappling irons away in mothballs. Shall we be up and doing?"

"Another little errand for you, first."

"Would it be a trip to the yacht to see Lady Itchy-britches, perchance?" The Sergeant tapped the rim of his glass. "A couple of these under my belt and I feel like a new woman."

"Doesn't concern the female of the species. Hop over to Pier Nine. Ask that super, Hurlihan, if he's seen or heard from Merrill Ovet. What he was doing Sunday morning, around noon. Bigwig Berger, at the Line offices, claims Joslin was with Hurlihan at the Sulgrave Hotel. But Joslin says he was with Merrill Ovet. Maybe all three of them got together. Like to know about that."

A City News legman strolled past, chewing on a toothpick. "They'll be fitting you birds out with depth charges, now, won't they, Lieutenant?"

"Yair? Why?"

"Didn't you hear? Flash just came through. One of those new super-subs was sighted only a few miles off Fire Island Light, just after dark last night. By those survivors the *Algonquin* brought in."

"Ah! Somebody probably saw some wreckage moving in a tide-rip,—thought they'd spotted the grampa of all periscopes. Don't get the public gidgety over a report like that." He dismissed it with an off-hand gesture and the newshawk moved on.

But there was nothing offhand about the urgency with which Koski put his call through to Coast Guard Intelligence . . .

XVIII

HENRY SUTLEE FROSS marched briskly down the marbled corridor of the thirty-eighth floor, past an arched door with the unobtrusive inscription:

*Fross, Graves, Burlingham,
Scott and Associates*

He used a pass-key, opened a door bearing no lettering nor any number. The furnishings of the room were somewhat unusual for an office building. In a blue-tiled fireplace embers glowed cheerfully; the pungent tang of hickory was evident. A chaise longue was arranged at one side of the tile hearth, a chair in cinnamon-colored chintz on the other. Carafes and bottles on a midget bar glistened under the soft light of a lime-shaded table lamp. The paintings on the walls were cubist still lifes; the frames wide and unpainted.

Fross took off his rubbers, placed them neatly on the floor of the tiny lavatory, scrubbed his hands vigorously with a silver nail-brush, craned his neck up to a heavy, circular mirror. What he saw through his pince-nez was a round moon-face with chastely pink cheeks, a clipped military mustache above small, thick lips. He brushed his hair back from its mathematically centered part, went out into the private cubicle, still brushing.

A cherry-wood box was murmuring: ". . . gentleman has been waiting fifteen minutes, sir . . . says it's urgent and he knows you're in. . ."

Fross tapped a switch. "Don't be obscure, Herman. What gentleman?" The switch clicked once more.

" . . . Morrie Schlauff, sir . . . says you will want to see him. . ."

"He hopes." Fross curled up the corners of his lips, unsmiling. "Two minutes. In the office. I'll be out to anyone else."

"How're you today, Mister Fross?" The man who came in was thin and alert; there was practically no chin under his sleazy mustache; his front teeth protruded like those of a rodent. "You're harder to get to than the box-office man at a hit show." He carried a folded newspaper in his right hand, slapped it against his thigh, as he spoke.

"I've been at court. What's so urgent?"

"Dough." Morrie Schlauff sat down, crossed his legs. "The purse is starving for dough."

"You've already received your . . . ah . . . retainer. We agreed on that."

"Past tense." Schlauff waggled the toe of a worn, brown oxford. "This is present. I'm upping the price. I want three hundred dollars an' I got to have it now."

Fross put on a patient expression. "I'll have to get hold of the client."

"Do we have to go over that same routine again? I told you I know who the client is. You're the client. So go ahead. Tell yourself to come across with three hundred more. On account."

"You're in error, Morrie." The lawyer made his eyes smile. "I'm acting for a client."

"I know who you're acting for. Do I get the money?"

Fross chuckled. "I presume you've earned it?"

"You presume right." Schlauff held the newspaper in his lap, smoothing the fold.

There was a pause. Fross laughed outright. "I'm waiting to see if it's worth an advance, Morrie."

"You'll grow roots in that chair, then, Mister Fross. I got something and it's red hot. But it cost me to get it. There might be more where that came from and that'll cost, too." He waved the newspaper. "If you don't want it, I know where I can peddle it."

The lawyer tilted his head to one side, shook it once. "You're a very difficult person to deal with." He slid open the top right-hand drawer of the desk, leaned over it and said: "Herman."

" . . . yes, Mister Fross?"

"Three hundred dollars. In fives and tens. Debit to the Schlauff entry. Have it ready there." He closed the drawer. "If I'd known at the beginning—"

"You'd still have hired me. Or someone like me. You couldn't have gone to one of the big agencies. So why bellyache now! Maybe if I'd known what I was getting into I wouldn't have taken the business, myself."

"Difficulties?"

"I never run into such a flock of plain-clothes cops in my life. All kinds,—city police, Uncle Sams, private guards. They been in my hair."

Fross registered mild surprise. "Why all the commotion?"

"A mere matter of homicide, is all."

The lawyer's face showed no emotion. "Mrs. Ovett?"

"Uh, uh. Man. That suitcase thing. It's in all the papers." He giggled. "I should be telling you. You probly know more about it than I do."

"I know nothing about it."

"Here." Schlauff unfolded an afternoon edition, tossed it on the desk. "Second colyum. Halfway down."

The lawyer read it swiftly "This doesn't tell me anything. Who was he? Who killed him? How does it concern the subject of our investigation?"

The fox-faced man held up a finger. "Ansel Gjersten, late engineer aboard the good ship *Seavett*." His second digit went up. "Nobody knows. Least, the cops or the G-boys don't seem to be sure. They're running around in circles, masterminding." A third finger joined the first two. "My private, off-the-stand opinion is, a certain M.O. gave him the bump. On account of Mrs. O."

FROSS PUT his tongue between his lips as if he was trying something on his taste buds. "Rather complicates the situation."

"Not as long as I'm the only one who knows it. You wanted something on M.O. I cased the Wyatt end, north and south. There might be something to it, but it would be tough to establish. M.O.'s been out of town most of the time. He has a residence up on Riverside. The Wyatt girl hasn't ever been there, or to his yacht or anywhere else with him except spaghetti joints around the waterfront. So that wouldn't amount to much if you were figuring to use it as a lever for . . . whatever you want it for."

Fross smiled pleasantly. "For a client."

"So whatever you say. But this murder angle is something. Providing they don't catch up with him and give him a fifteen-thousand volt hot-foot. You will have something on him which ought to make him hold up his paws and bark for a biscuit."

"I believe penalties are provided for the compounding of a felony, my agile-minded friend. Withholding information concerning a murder would distinctly come under

that classification, would it not?"

"You're damn tooting it would." Morrie giggled again, stroked his mustache. "That's what I get paid for. Withholding the information that lets you put over this, —uh,—coercion . . . for your client."

The lawyer examined his fingernails, took out a file, began to rasp them energetically. "As a member of the bar and an officer of the court, I couldn't condone any such suggestion, Morrie. But," he raised his eyes quizzically, "I doubt if you have your facts in hand."

"I got enough. I trail M.O. from the bus station when he gets in from Charleston. I'm on his rear bumper over to a place on Swamp Street where he has a heart-to-heart with a man name of Joslin. He's sitting in one end of a subway car over to Brooklyn, and I'm on the platform at the other end. I'm right behind him out to a shipyard over there, Rodd's, they call it. I even crash the gate past the guard by saying I'm for the *Seavett*, too. I don't see him after he goes on board the yacht. But I hear him and some other man, likely this Gjersten, talking through a porthole. I can't get close enough to catch much of the conversation because there is an old boy fussing around with ropes on the deck. But I hear M.O. say something about Big Dommy's place. He is supposed to meet someone there, maybe this other man he is talking to. So when the motors begin to buzz and some Porto Rican or maybe a Filipino comes out on the dock, I beat it."

"Interesting," Fross smiled a reproof, "but not conclusive."

"Wait'll I finish. It takes me a while to locate this Big Dommy's, which is a dump over behind the Erie Basin and I *mean* a dump. I spend some jingle at the bar and don't see M.O. But while I'm standing there guzzling, in comes a skinny blonde with henna hair and a kind of lonesome look to her. She goes around the barroom and asks everyone if they have seen Ansel around. This Ansel must be known in those parts because they don't say they don't know him, just that they haven't seen him." Morrie retrieved the newspaper, crackled it significantly. "Ansel is the party of the first part in this suitcase story."

"I read it. What is the point?"

"The point is this. I stick around quite a while and this girl who everybody calls

Claire goes upstairs to the stopover rooms and comes down a few times, but all along she is whining about Ansel not having met her like he promised. According to her, he was there in the afternoon and didn't pay off but told her he would see her later. By and by she goes away and in comes a flint-face from the city force; I can spot one of those badge-carriers like a sore thumb. He ruffles up the proprietor's feathers some and they go upstairs together. I am just deciding M.O. is not going to show and am about to run along when down comes the city sleuth with Big Dommy in tow. They are looking for someone and who do you think it is?"

"M.O.?"

"No. At least, not right then. The city cop is inquiring about Claire. The girl who was with Ansel in the afternoon."

THE LAWYER laced and unlaced his fingers, abstractedly. "What has all this to do with our little investigation, Morrie?"

"Quite a good deal, quite a lot. I don't hang around while the badge does his business but later on I go back and the place is swarming with buttons. I buy a drink where it will do the most good and I use my ears and after a while I get the layout. The room upstairs where Ansel and the girl went earlier in the day, that was where the murder was committed. The corpse couldn't be identified completely, being in sections as it were, but the police are convinced it is Ansel."

Fross let annoyance sharpen his tone. "All very absorbing, Morrie. But it leaves a little to be desired. You haven't placed M.O. at the crime."

"I heard him say he was going there. I heard him say it to the man who got killed. The buttons have flyers out for M.O. They sent his description out on the teletype and on the radio. It might not be enough for the prosecutor's office but it ought to go a long way to help you. I don't know just what it is you're after. But I got a four-star hunch there's more to it than just some stock deal."

A green glass button on the inner edge of Fross's desk glowed like a lighted emerald, went out. He opened the drawer.

". . . a gentleman to see you, Mister Fross. . . ."

"Mister Fross has gone out, Herman. He will be back in an hour." Fross started to close the drawer but the box inside spoke again, hurriedly.

". . . the gentleman is from the police, sir . . . his name is Koski . . . Lieutenant Koski . . . and he says he must see Mister Fross immed — HERE — STOP — YOU CAN'T —" the voice changed abruptly. ". . . Do you come out, Fross? Or do I come in after you?"

Schlauff got to his feet fast. "Psst! . . . Let me out through that trick exit of yours. That's the city badge I was telling you about. I don't want him to find me—"

Fross slammed the drawer. "You imbecile! He heard you! That switch was open—"

The door opened softly.

Koski walked in.

XIX

THE MAN from the Harbor Squad eyed Schlauff with satisfaction. "Well, well. The face is familiar. But I don't seem to recall the name."

"Name is Schlauff. Morris Schlauff. Of Schlauff International Investigators, Incorporated."

"I meant to pass around a pat on the back for that handwriting on the wall. But you got away too fast." Koski measured him up and down. It would be hard for Schlauff to masquerade as a sailor, even with a bandage hiding his foxlike, protruding teeth. "How you do get around."

"Professional duties." Morrie smirked.

"I've had every cop in Brooklyn on the *qui vive* for you. Where do you fit in this picture?"

Fross said smoothly: "One of my clients has been employing Mister Schlauff on a divorce investigation."

"That's right. Nothing to do with my being over at Dommy's place." Morrie smoothed the newspaper with the flat of his hand.

"Do I look like Charlie McCarthy?" Koski roamed around the room. "I'm not enough of a dummy to take that. You were trailing Gjersten or young Ovet. Or both. Else you wouldn't have recognized the Purdo girl." He talked to Schlauff; watched Fross.

"I just happened to be there," Morrie

protested, "when someone mentioned her name. That's absolutely the fact."

"You're working for Fross, hah? Well," Koski faced the lawyer, "who are *you* working for?"

"I am bound to respect the confidence of my client," Fross smiled frankly, "but I don't believe she'd have any objection to your being informed. Mrs. Barbara Ovet." "

"What's the blueprint? She afraid her husband is going to divorce her? She after evidence against him so court proceedings against her would be a standoff?"

"You are very keen." Fross's eyebrows went up in obvious admiration. "That is the way it lines up, exactly."

"Might be the way you'd like me to believe it lines up. But don't tell me Schlauff was in that Brooklyn dive after an adultery affidavit!" Koski was sardonic. "A judge would rule that out so fast it would make your ears ring. Nobody'd know that better than you. Maybe you were trying to get the goods on young Ovet. But there'll be some other reason. Whatsit?"

The lawyer seemed amused. "As far as this office is concerned, the matter is quite routine. Mrs. Ovet wished to undertake an investigation which is possibly a little distasteful, but entirely legitimate. I simply acted as intermediary in assigning the investigation to Mister Schlauff. I can't speak for him, naturally. I don't know what he may have uncovered—"

"Wa-a-ait a minute." Schlauff sat up straight, rolling the newspaper up into a tight cylinder. "Nobody ever accused me of being a middleman; I don't intend to start now with the police on one side and a law firm on the other. This isn't my picnic; the best I'll get out of it is a few crumbs."

FROSS'S eyes glinted behind the pince-nez; he cut in rapidly before Koski could speak: "There's no reason why you shouldn't tell the authorities any fact of which you have *definite* knowledge, Morrie."

Koski held up his hand, "How's for skipping all the hipper-dipper? I'm tired of listening to you bounce yourselves back and forth. You're not testifying before a Grand Jury panel. There's no court stenographer around." He shoved his hat up so the brim was at a forty-five degree angle, put a foot on the rung of Schlauff's chair, leaned

over, crossed his forearms on the upraised knee. "You trailed Merrill Ovet over to the Bar-Nothing. You saw him with Ansel Gjersten. Maybe you saw a man with a bandage around his face."

"No sir, Lieutenant. Only one I saw was this Purdo babe. I heard her asking about Gjersten. That's all I know, positively."

Koski made an ejaculation of disgust. "You were back at Dommy's after I left. You cuddled up to one of the precinct boys; he remembered it when I put out the net for you. So you know a man was killed up in one of the rooms. That we're hunting the murderer. You must have shadowed Merrill to the yacht at Rodd's. So you probably know Gjersten and Ovet had an argument."

Schlauff did his best to grin, but his eyes shifted to Fross. The grin froze.

Koski moved so his body was between Schlauff and the lawyer; spoke as if Fross were nonexistent:

"You're one of the those boys who carry your heart around in your wallet, Schlauff. All right. How much'd your license cost you?"

"You should ask. You get paid for carrying your badge. Mine cost me two hundred counters. And a little greasing of the wheels, besides."

"Going to throw away an investment like that?"

"You don't need to intimidate me, Lieutenant." Schlauff leaned well back in his chair to get as far away from Koski's eyes as possible. "I realize I got a living to make. So maybe it's not the best living in the world;—I couldn't even buy coffee and cakes if my ticket was revoked;—I appreciate it, believe me."

"That makes better. Now . . . *where is Ovet?*"

"If I should be struck dead this second, I swear I couldn't tell you, Lieutenant. The last time I saw him was going on to the yacht at Rodd's."

Fross said smoothly. "That's correct, Lieutenant."

"Maybe. Far as it goes." Koski wheeled on him. "You people are going to get yourselves in a jam, here. There's more than one murder involved. A girl got dropped over in Brooklyn today,—because she might have known something. You

gents know something,—more than you're letting out. You beat us to the gun on Ovet. You were trailing him before we were. And you're keeping pretty close tabs on his wife."

"I don't follow you."

"Two of your former employees were working on the *Seavett*; she hired them on your recommendation."

"Correct."

"They wouldn't be much use watching Merrill, because generally he wasn't on the yacht long enough to change his shirt. But if they'd been paid off to report on Mrs. Ovet's doings, they'd have been able to put you hep to a lot of stuff. Give you the whip hand over her."

"Nobody has control over Barbara Ovet." The lawyer chose his words carefully. "A sex hangover from some promiscuous ancestor has made her emotionally unstable and mentally unreliable."

"Why you acting for her on this divorce tangle,—against young Ovet, then? At the same time you're corporation counsel for his father?" Koski circled the room, restlessly.

"The interests may seem to differ. Actually they are identical. My loyalty is to the Line which fees me; I act in its behalf to prevent the dispersal of its securities into hands which might impair their value."

"Whose hands?"

"A person who knows nothing whatever about ships or the shipping business. And who may be inclined, accordingly, to adopt policies which would wreck the company." The lawyer nodded at Schlauff. "Morrie will corroborate me. Miss Ellen Wyatt."

"How's she get in the mixup?"

"No reason why I shouldn't tell you. It's a matter of public record. Merrill's aware his activities subject him to great risk, but he didn't make a will to dispose of the minority stock his grandfather left him. He gave it outright to establish Blue Water Babies, a foundation. Stated purpose, to provide for the care of children left fatherless by the fortunes of submarine warfare."

"Has my vote. If it's as stated. Show me somebody who's against it."

"NO ONE IS, naturally. That's the point. It's too good an idea to ruin. But the Foundation won't be able to carry out its program if the stock which endows

it loses money. Which it will do if the Line is run by the governors Merrill has appointed for the Foundation."

"Who'll the governors be?" Koski watched a puzzled frown deepen on Schlauff's face.

"Besides Miss Wyatt, Merrill himself and a union radical named Joslin. None of them has ever had the slightest experience in conducting a business. Miss Wyatt's to be chairman; she'll appoint successors if either of the other should . . . be incapacitated."

"How'll this setup affect the Ovet Lines, if Merrill only owns a minority interest?"

"The boy will inherit his father's stock, which will undoubtedly be given to the Foundation, too—if Merrill has his way. Miss Wyatt will then control a definite majority of the voting shares. You see?"

"I get a glimmer." The Lieutenant stared bleakly. "You think the old man won't live much longer. You hired Schlauff to get the goods on Merrill so you could stop his transferring the shares to the Foundation. Or maybe Schlauff dug up some dirt about Mrs. Ovet and one of the yacht-hands and tipped Merrill off, hoping the boy would pull some rough work and put himself out of the picture."

The investigator came up out of his chair. "Hey, now! Don't put me on the spot. I never talked to M.O. in my life; I've told you all I know."

"Hell you have." Koski gripped Schlauff's arm. "You know more. What you might know is this. The murderer we're after may be supplying the background for this flurry of sub sinkings off the coast. You're not holding out on the Police Department. You're crisscrossing the old gentleman with the beard and the beaver hat. You're helping to gang up on the guys who sleep with their pants on and one ear cocked for the call to put on life-belts."

Fross slapped his desk smartly, for emphasis. "That puts quite a different light on it. *Quite* a different aspect. Neither Morrie or I would hesitate to give you any information we might possess . . . or may possess in the future . . . if it comes to a patriotic consideration."

Schlauff chimed in: "You're damn tooting. Just give me a chance to *heil . . . ptth . . . right in der Fuehrer's face.*"

Fross removed his pince-nez, tapped his

thick lips with the rim of one lens. "Do I understand you? Merrill is the traitorous individual you mention?"

"You understand I want Ovet. I want him damn quick."

The lawyer sat up very straight. "I might possibly be able to suggest a train of thought in that direction."

"You've got a clear track." Koski wheeled about.

"He may have gone to sea, again. You knew he's been getting firsthand experience as a sailor, I presume."

"Yair."

"Under a *nom de guerre*."

"Now you're touching the spot. What name?"

"I regret my inability to advise you on that point."

"Ever hear him mention any name he might have used on other trips?"

"I *am* sorry." The lawyer nipped at a speck of dust on his coat sleeve. "I can't help you."

"Say." Schlauff slapped the newspaper against the calf of his leg. "I don't know the tag M.O. used for shipping purposes. But I might know where to find out . . ."

"It's like pulling back teeth," Koski growled. "Spit it out."

Schlauff rose, tossing his newspaper in the chair. "There's something in that report on the Wyatt girl, Mister Fross." He kept facing Koski and the lawyer, backed toward the door of the sanctum. "She used to call him some whacky name," he put his hand on the knob almost reluctantly. "I heard her use it once in a booth. I'll show you . . ." He slid out of sight. The door closed softly after him.

Fross laughed, skeptically. "*Sinbad*. It's ridiculous; Merrill wouldn't attempt anything as juvenile—" his voice dwindled away as Koski got to the inner door, flung it open.

THE Harbor Squad man hissed a monosyllabic, strode through the cozy-nook, opened the private door to the hall, looked out. There was no one in the corridor. He dived toward the red bulb marking the stairs, jerked open the door, listened. No sound of running feet; nothing but distant traffic noises.

He cursed under his breath. Trying to run down a sharpshooter like Schlauff in a

building as big as this might take half a day; time Koski couldn't spare now. He stalked back into the office, muttering: "Singlehanded Schlauff. Needs his teeth fixed up. First thing he knows somebody'll straighten them for him. With a spade—" He cut it short. Both offices were empty. Koski moved swiftly through the corridor to the reception room. "Where's Fross?"

The bespectacled old man at the switchboard regarded him owlily. "I couldn't say, sir."

"He go out just now?"

"I didn't see him, sir."

"You wouldn't." Koski went back into Fross's office, rummaged around, found nothing that interested him. In the private cubicle he had better luck. In a handkerchief on the shelf under the portable bar was a nickel-plated hammerless.

The Lieutenant stuck a pencil in the barrel, held it up so he could sniff at the muzzle without touching it. It was a thirty-two and it had been cleaned since it was last fired.

He wrapped it in the handkerchief again, put it in his pocket, went out to the elevator by the private door.

XX

FINGERS of fog crept across Battery Park, strangling the lambent blue at the subway kiosk, shrouding a newspaper stand in golden haze. A tug groaned dimly; a St. George ferry hooted back. There was no dusk, only an enveloping grayness which grew steadily darker. Koski opened the door marked *Harbor Precinct*, stood with hands on his hips. He sniffed, grumbled:

"Haven't you guys heard?"

Mulcahey took his feet off the teletypewriter desk. "What's of new?"

"You can live three weeks without food, three days without water. But only three minutes without air." He stalked to the window, jerked the steel sash up. The dim light above the landing stage fifty feet away outlined the *Vigilant* in soft focus.

"We had that open, coach." The Sergeant objected. "It is an invitation to double pneumonia. The mist comes rolling in like we're in that cave under Niagara Falls."

"You'll stand in a damp hallway for an

hour, saying good night to a dame. Get you inside a warm office, right away you're sensitive to moisture." Koski slumped into his straight-backed chair, shuffled through the departmental circulars on his desk. The teletype clattered; a short-wave receiver muttered monotonously in one corner.

"What do them convoy navigators do, dense weather this way, skipper? They are not allowed to tootle their klaxons."

"Follow the wake of the ship ahead. Ship tows a buoy with a hook sticking up on top, cuts the waves, makes a ripple of white water." Koski tossed aside a notification of an Anchor Association meeting. "If it gets too thick to see that, they run blind, Irish. And trust to luck. Same like us on this case."

Mulcahey tilted his head back, winked laboriously at O'Malley. "My sense of tuition informs me that something has gone sour. What marches?"

"Time." Koski stuck his hands in his trouser pockets, stretched his legs out stiffly. "And still not Merrill Ovett."

"The next three hours will march none too quick for me. At one bell in the next watch I will be nestling alongside the most seductive suzy the human arm ever encircled."

"You'll be nestling in the Gowanus. With a set of body drags."

"Ah, now, Steve. I give this damsel my iron-clad guarantee . . ."

KOSKI rubbed his eyes wearily. "There's no such word as *femme* in your lexicon, Irish. Until we pack this in the Finished file." He took out the handkerchief with the revolver, unscrewed the cap of his fountain pen, found a manila tag, tied it to the trigger-guard. "To Identification. With love and kisses. Ask them to shoot to Ballistics."

Mulcahey hefted it. "Would this be the barker that bit the Purdo babe?"

"If so, one Henry Fross suffers from carelessness. He doesn't impress me as careless. Still, I'd like an expert verdict. If it isn't asking too much . . . ?

"I will hustle it thither on the instant." The Sergeant turned, pivoted around again, "Say,—it nearly slipped my mind—"

"What slipped what . . .?"

"Homicide traces the suitcase."

"Where?"

"A drugstore. Off Times Square. It is the first time I realize the drugstores are in the luggage business."

"Hell. Some of them carry farm machinery. Any clerk remember the purchaser?"

"That's the way they traced it. By asking around about a buyer with a turban on the south end of his head. Further than that, the identification remains nil and void. But there is one funny thing . . ."

"Make *me* laugh."

"This buyer carries a roll of something when he comes into the store. There is a paper around it so the clerk cannot be sure but he thinks it is oilcloth. It smells like oilcloth. There are very few things in this world which smell like oilcloth, thanks be."

"Yair." Koski nodded, slowly. "To put under the body while he was sawing it up. When did he make the buy?"

"About two-thirty or three Sunday afternoon. That's the top of the news . . . from here." Mulcahey went out.

Koski pulled a sheet off a pile of blank forms; under the heading DETECTIVE'S DAILY ACTIVITY REPORT—FORM DD62, he wrote the date: 3/20/42. He looked at the paper.

Where would he begin:—with the *Seavett*, Ansel Gjersten, Merrill Ovett, Captain Cardiff, Frankie the Filip, Barbara? What to say about the Bar-Nothing, Big Dommy, Dora, Schlauff, Claire Purdo, the man in the cotton mask? How ought he to cover Ellen Wyatt, and Tim Joslin? Or the angles at the Ovett Line; Clem Hurlihan, Rolf Berger, Lawford Ovett? And friend Fross?

After a while he put the cap back on his fountain pen, laid DD62 at one side of his desk, went into the bunk-room, tossed his coat on the cot with his shield number on it. He opened his locker, dug out a razor and shaving cream, filled a tumbler with water, busied himself with lather, staring out the window at the mouth of the river. The fog had thinned momentarily under the night breeze. The soft blurs of light had sharpened to brighter pinpoints of red, white, yellow . . .

Koski read them as if they had been neon advertisements on Broadway, before

the dimout. Those three vertical whites moving almost imperceptibly away from the Battery would be a tug with coal barges coming up from the stake-boat off Black Tom. That cluster of faint yellow dots across the river,—the Coast Guard patrol cutter at the main channel. The luminous red and green, close to the water,—an oil barge from Bayonne for Spuyten Duyvil. And riding sluggishly in the thinner vapor high above the water, two clear, white sparks,—one above the other; that might be a freighter bound out for Quarantine, the net at the Narrows, the assembly port and . . . God knows where. Her convoy number would be showing by daylight; her name would be painted out. But under the clay-gray war paint Koski thought it likely she would have on her stern the letters *S-A-N-T-A P-O-B-R-I-C-O*.

HE WONDERED if the little metal replica was on the wall chart in Hurlihan's office; how long it would remain there . . .

The phone *brrrd*. Koski said: "Yair. Here. Go."

"Philbrick, Ballistics, Lieutenant . . . Homicide says you want the dope on that slug from the Treanor Place shooting . . . It weighed seventy-two grams . . . came from a thirty-two caliber Harrington and Richardson automatic . . . manufactured in Worcester, Mass., some time subsequent to 1935 . . . weapon you're after will be rifled with a six-groove left-twist spiral. Pitch, ten and a half inches . . . groove depth, ten-thousandths of an inch . . . groove width, forty-two thousandths . . . smokeless powder used in the cartridge . . . the shells will show an ejector mark which has been isolated . . . the barrel was comparatively clean when the gun was fired."

"H&R 32 auto. Okay."

"You have anything you want us to test against that, Lieutenant?"

"*You* have one I don't need tested. An S&W I just sent over. Ticketed Henry Fross. Skipola. Thanks."

He had scraped one side of his face when the phone went into action again. This time it was Nixon.

"I have a rare specimen for your collection."

"From the stiff?"

"B-yutiful prints. Nearly good as new."

"What does it get us?" Koski began on the other side of his face.

"Same as a couple we picked off the bedstead in Room Five at Dominick's."

"Shows what science can do. When given a chance." Koski rinsed the razor. "The one place we know for sure he had been. That the crop?"

"Give us time, pardner."

"That's what I've got nothing but. Find something, for Pete's sake. How about that stuff from the Joslin garret?"

"We found a million. Take us a week to classify. He must hold seances or something."

"Yair. Nothing from the Purdo flat?"

"Zero. Killer must have worn gloves."

"I'll fit him out with wristbands if you'll only give a little. Much oblige. For what?" He *hung up*.

Mulcahey stuck his head in from the muster room.

"When you get done with your toilette, sire . . ."

"Something?"

"A rum-dum to see you. He is stumbling all around, stewed to the scuppers. I done my best to shoo him off but he does not shoo."

"What's he look like?" Koski washed off the remains of the lather.

"A refugee from a Walt Disney, no kidding."

"Pluto? Or Mickey?"

"That Reynard the Fox, in the one about—"

"Fox!" Koski dried his face, hurriedly. "Thin? Mustache? Thirty-five to forty?"

"I am glad nobody runs him in for clut-tering up the hallowed precinct, if you are acquainted with him."

Koski dived out the door, went down on the run.

Morrie Schlauff shambled along the wall by the door, trying to brace himself with futile pawings. He weaved unsteadily as Koski reached him.

"Shails...unner...name..." he muttered thickly. "Shails.'" he swayed...

"Seldom have I met up with a hand-somer snootful." Mulcahey clumped to the foot of the stairs.

"Save it, Irish!" Koski put his arm

around the investigator's shoulders. "Say it again, Schlauff."

"Shails . . . Breeco . . ." The man grimaced, struggled to balance himself, toppled against the wall. His hat slid askew over his eyes, fell to the floor. The hair on the left side of his crown was matted as if he had rubbed oil in it.

"Amby, Irish! Double quick!" Koski held Schlauff erect.

"Hurt he is? Me bawling him out for being stinko!"

"Skull fracture, for Pete's sake! Snap into it!" The Harbor Squad man put his face close to Schlauff's. "One more try. What name'd Ovett use?"

Schlauff's eyes rolled. His lower jaw went slack. He made a final tremendous effort, ". . . going . . . shink." His lips worked convulsively . . . "shink . . . breeco . . ." His tongue lolled, his knees sagged. He was a limp weight in Koski's arms when Mulcahey rushed back.

"Here in three minutes. Holy Mother! 'S he gone?"

"Just out. Might go. Might not. Pull his legs out straight. Have to hold him sitting up."

"What was he mumbling in his beard?"

"Name of the ship our man got away on, Irish."

"Got away!"

"JUST WENT down harbor. Ten minutes ago. The *Santa Pobrico*. Of the Ovett Line. Sounded as if he was trying to say the *Pobrico's* going to be sunk." He scowled at the wound on Schlauff's head. "I ought to be sore at the dumb cluck. He thought he'd put over a swiftie, collect himself an easy dollar. Walked into one hell of a beating. Had guts enough to make it over here, when he found out what he was up against." The wail of a siren rose and fell. "I wish I knew just what the guy was trying to get to me. He couldn't have had it far wrong. Or he wouldn't have been taken, like that."

O'Malley yelled from the detective office: "Hey, they got Joslin."

Koski barked: "Who did?"

"One the Oak Street boys." O'Malley hurried out. "He tails the Wyatt dame. To the Lighthouse, over by Fulton Mar-

ket. An' who does she have a rendezvous with but Hardrock Joslin! How you like!"

"I like it. Is Oak Street still there?"

"Standing by. Waiting for orders."

"Tell him to keep standing. I'm on my way."

The long, gray car rolled up.

"Sarge, you ride in the amby. Stick with Schlauff until I get a steno-guy over to the hospital. I want to know if he says anything more before he goes under. Don't muff it, now."

"If it comes my way, I will catch it."

Koski let the interne take his burden, hopped in a squad car, was speeding across Battery Park before the ambulance door shut.

XXI

THE LIGHT in the Lighthouse was bad. At the side of each table a small, round pool of yellow dripped from a miniature beacon onto the red-checked tablecloth. This electrical economy made it unnecessary for the proprietor to be too scrupulous about the spotlessness of the table linen; besides, the customers who came to the waterfront café considered its broiled butterfish and sautéed sole all that was required in the way of interior decoration.

In addition to this protective lack of illumination, the man at the corner table by the door marked WASHROOM sat so his face was in the deepest shadow. Also he managed to sit back against the wall so he was partially shielded by the girl opposite him; he was virtually invisible to anyone at the front of the café. Only when the fragrance of clam broth or french-fried squid, sweeping in from the kitchen behind him, gave notice of the curtained street-door's opening, did he lean forward sufficiently to peer around this table companion.

"Hope I didn't keep you waiting long, Tim."

"Not very long, Ellen."

"That delicatessen boy only delivered your message ten minutes ago."

"I'd have come around to the studio only all day '*I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me. . .*'" He passed her a nearly illegible menu. "Haven't eaten, have you?"

"Haven't felt like eating, Tim."

"Better order, anyway. Look more natural." An elderly waiter in a soiled dickey shambled up to their table. "No use letting it get you down."

"How can I help it? With Merrill in trouble?"

"He'll be out of trouble in a few hours." Joslin crumbled a hard roll.

"He's running away?"

"Done gawn already. The fried flounder isn't so bad in here."

She nodded to the waiter. "I'll have that. Boiled potatoes."

"Same here, Bill."

Ellen reached across the table, put her hand on the organizer's sleeve. "You don't believe he did it, do you?"

"I don't believe one way or the other." Joslin buttered the crust. "Until I hear what he has to say."

"Haven't you heard from him?"

"How could I? I haven't dared to go near my room."

"You weren't followed here?"

"Don't think so. But maybe you were." He moved slightly to observe a middle-aged man who had just come out of a phone booth near the cashier's desk at the door and gone back to his table. Joslin pantomimed with his fork. "That's one of those burrs sticking to us, now, I think."

"Which one?"

"Middle-aged bird, second table from the door. He's been taking great pains not to look our way."

"I'm sorry. If I've put you in a corner, Tim."

"Think nothing of it. There's a way to make sure about him." He stood up. "Watch this." He ambled toward the door.

THE MIDDLE-AGED man took out his watch, muttered beneath his breath as if unaware of the lateness of the hour. He wiped his lips quickly, laid the napkin down, reached into his trousers pocket.

Joslin swerved, stepped to the cashier's desk. "Pack of Luckies." He slipped a coin on the glass without noticing the man at the second table. When the organizer turned to go back to his table, he turned the other way. He ripped open the corner of the pack, tapped out a cigarette, offered one to Ellen.

"Thank you, Tim." She bent her head sideways to the match he held out. "He started to pay his check. But he's changed his mind. He's fished out some money. Going into the phone booth."

"That's one of them, all right." He dug into the flounder. "I'll cross him up, anyway. I know this restaurant. That's why I asked you to come here. There's a little bolt-hole I can use in an emergency."

"But why were they watching *me*?"

"They expect him to get in touch with you. Let 'em expect. I won't dodge any cops tomorrow. By that time his ship will be well out. Merrill told me on Sunday he was going right out again—probably on the *Pobrico*. But I couldn't give him any advice, then. That was before I knew about . . . this other thing. I wouldn't know what to say to him now, anyhow." He crunched on the roll. "I couldn't know how it feels to find another man . . . and your wife. Even if you don't have any illusions about your wife. . . ."

Ellen was puzzled. "I don't want to know how he managed to get on board or what name he used this time. Then I won't have to pretend I don't know, if the police ask me. But I should think they'd have been patrolling at the piers for him."

"They were there in bunches. Some of the gang told me every time they turned around there'd be another stranger giving them the up and down. They had leaflets with his picture and description."

"Why didn't they recognize him?"

"Same reason you wouldn't have, Ellen. You never saw a man change so much in so short a time."

"Those days in the lifeboat?"

"Sure. No food the last five days, except one chocolate bar. Four swallows of water every twenty-four hours. Lifeboats are stocked with plenty but the sub shelled the one he was in. The Nazi idea of good, clean fun. Didn't hit the boat, but a splinter stove in one provision locker. Salt water did the rest. Merrill lost about forty pounds. Makes a hell of a difference in his appearance. His face is so thin. . . ."

"But even so, Tim—"

"That's not all." Joslin took out an old envelope, filled with newspaper clippings. He picked one out, unfolded it to its three-

column width, passed it across the table. "The *Mercede* wasn't one of the banana boats like most of the line. She was a tanker; they used her on the Venezuelan run; what they call a clean tanker—only carried gasoline."

Ellen studied the clipping. There was a head line:

PRESIDENT LAUDS
WINNER OF NEW
MARINE MEDAL

Below was a photograph of a dark-haired youth bending over to have a sixteen-pointed star attached to his uniform. The captain said Eric Haveline was a quartermaster on the *Santa Mercede*, aged twenty-five, a resident of Easton, Maryland, and bashful.

"It's tough being on one of those oil cans when they get hit," Joslin went on. "If the torpedo doesn't tear you apart or stun you so you don't get on deck in time, you may get a chance to burn to death when those five million gallons start to burn and spread out over a mile of water."

She read:

For heroism above and beyond his call of duty during enemy attack when he released and launched a life raft from a sinking and burning ship and maneuvered it through a pool of burning oil to clear water by swimming under water, coming up only to breathe—

Joslin watched the man at the second table, uneasily. "That quartermaster was burned pretty bad while he was swimming back to the ship for four others. Merrill had his hair singed to the roots."

Ellen's "Yes?" was barely audible.

Haveline related to the President how the submarine had surfaced close to his lifeboat. Its commander, after inquiring in excellent English, whether Captain Ovet or any of the ship's officers had been rescued and receiving a denial, proceeded to withdraw and at a half-mile distance sent several shells crashing close to the survivors' heads before submerging.

"When Merrill's hair grew out again, it was white." Joslin laid sixty cents quietly under the edge of his plate, watchful of the middle-aged man. "When you add to the white hair and loss of weight

the fact that he looks ten years older than he did before this last trip, you can see why the eagle-eyes didn't recognize him."

"Tim!" Ellen touched the clipping with a fingertip. "This says the submarine commander asked for Captain Ovet!"

"Yeah." He avoided her gaze.

"But there *isn't* any Captain Ovet."

"No. Might have been the Nazi's idea there was—the *Mercede* being an Ovet ship."

"You don't believe that. There was something more to it than that. You're keeping something from me."

"No. Honestly." He squirmed in his chair. "That thing bothered Merrill, too. He naturally wondered if anyone on the sub really did know there was an Ovet aboard the *Mercede*. It was the reason he wanted to see his father so badly; he called the old man's house from the pool-room under my place. But Lawford Ovet had just left for a meeting of the Shipowners Council with that bucko mate of his, Berger. So I guess Merrill went over to the yacht first, intending to see his father later. Then this other thing happened. . . ." He jumped to his feet, dived for the washroom door.

Ellen heard Koski's voice from the kitchen door: "Hold everything, hard-boiled."

The door to the washroom slammed behind Joslin. Before the union man could turn the key in the lock, Koski hurled his weight against the center panel, forced the door open. Ellen heard shoes scuffing on a tile floor, muttered oaths. Then Joslin came out with the Lieutenant behind him. The organizer's red hair was mussed up. His leather jacket hiked up in front where Koski gripped it, in back.

"As you were." The Harbor Squad man pushed Joslin into his chair. "I haven't time to keep shagging after you. Squat and stay put. Unless you want to eat your next meal in cuffs."

He drew up a third chair, sat down.

XXII

ELLEN SLIPPED the clipping into her coat pocket. "Aren't you tired of following us around, Lieutenant?"

He tossed his hat toward a hook, ringed

it. "Yair. I'm tired. Of getting the runaround from a couple of cubs who don't seem to know from apples."

Joslin drank some water. "We told you we didn't know what it was all about."

"You did. I want what you do know."

The waiter wandered in, observed Koski uneasily.

The man from the Harbor Precinct picked up the menu. "I might grab off a quickie, Bill. Crab sandwich, hot. Coffee, black. *Vite!*"

"Sure, boss." The waiter shuffled away. Up front, the middle-aged man paid his check, departed.

Koski leaned back in his chair. The pain in his side hadn't lessened. His headache had returned, with sound effects. "We had a tip young Ovett was going out on the *Santa Pobrico*."

Joslin traced a pattern on the tablecloth with his fork; it looked to Koski like the silhouette of a submarine. He went on: "Coast Guard made a search at the pier just before the steamer sailed."

Ellen folded and refolded an empty paper match container.

"Went over her from truck to keelson," Koski moved back to let the waiter put a plate before him. "Tip was slightly cockeyed. Merrill Ovett wasn't aboard."

"I thought he was," Joslin admitted. "He told me he might ship out on her."

"Tim would have told you," Ellen reached across the table, covered the organizer's hand with her own, "except we were afraid—"

"—of the wrong thing, yair. You were afraid we'd catch him. You should have been afraid of the kind of guy who'd murder a man, cleave him into hunks and toss him in a tideway. Who'd shoot down a girl because she might have been a witness against him. Who'd batter a private op within an inch of his life because the dumb dope stuck his nose in the wrong place. Guy behind that sort of mayhem's nobody to play ring-around-the-rosie with."

"I didn't know about those others." Joslin stopped doodling.

The color drained out of Ellen's face. "You haven't anything to connect Merrill with . . . these crimes."

"No? The girl came from a disorderly house three blocks from where his yacht

was lying. The private investigator had trailed him over there."

"Not like Merrill," Joslin said, tightly. "He has a lousy temper. But he'd never shoot a woman."

"That's the sort of brutality you'd expect from a Nazi," Ellen cried. "It would revolt Merrill as much as it does us." She took out the clipping. "You can't really believe a man who'd go through hell and high water like this," she handed it to Koski, "would bludgeon anyone just because he was being followed."

Koski scanned the clipping as he ate. "Queer." He read on. "About this sub commander knowing he was on the *Mercede*."

"Just a stab in the dark." There was no conviction in Joslin's tone.

"Think so? Mention it to you?"

"Yes. Said none of the others in his lifeboat knew *who* he was. So he kept quiet. But it kind of . . . worried him."

"Yair." The Lieutenant drank his coffee. "Lost a lot of weight in the lifeboat, didn't he?"

"They all did." Joslin chewed on his lower lip, scowling. "Merrill looked bad. That's why I thought. . . ."

Koski set his cup down with a clatter. "You been thinking about it long enough. I've been thinking the same thing." He laid a bill on the table, stood up, reached for his hat. "You going to come across with that alias he used? Or do I get it the hard way—"

"M. Stanley," Joslin said. "That's what he told me."

"His grandfather's middle name," Ellen nodded, solemnly. "I hope you're wrong . . . about what you've been thinking."

Koski motioned toward the door. "The coop's outside. You better come along. Both of you."

They made a silent procession out to the street; there was no conversation in the car on the way to the Basin.

A burly shape in oilskins and sou'wester was huddled over the *Vigilant's* transom, tinkering with a loose exhaust pipe. The Sergeant waved a strip of asbestos packing:

"Come on in. The water's fine. It's dripping down my back faster than it can run out my shoes."

"Pity the sailors on a night like this."

"And pity a poor lug misfortunate enough to be doing repair work on a rust-pot like this when by all rights I should be conducting an intimate affair in a bood-war. Hello . . . passengers, no less?" He grinned a greeting to the girl, let the grin flatten against his teeth as he recognized Joslin. "If it isn't the tough turkey. Come aboard, my fine-feathered friend and we will take up where we left off."

KOSKI SNAPPED: "Forgetsis, Sarge. Get your mind on the race. We're rolling down to Rio."

Mulcahey groaned. "The Gowanus, God forbid?"

"No. Caulk instead of talk. We're overdue at the *Pobrico*."

"In two shakes she will be as good as new. Almost."

"Have her ready to r'ar, Joe. I'm going inside to get off a message."

They foamed out into the bay. Joslin crouched on the transom seat at the stern, with an arm around Ellen. Spray burst over the foredeck, showered the cockpit. Koski tossed a tarpaulin back to the two huddled aft. "No law against bundling." He joined Mulcahey in the pilot-house.

"Any word from the detention ward, Irish?"

"As good as could be expected, coach. Schlauff pulled through the operation. He is on the critical list and will not be able to appreciate the nurses for a couple of days at the very least." The dark bulk of the Statue of Liberty loomed up on the starboard quarter.

"What about the stenographer?"

"He sticks at the bedside; he is in the operating room; goes into a dead faint when proceedings begin. They resuscitate him and pick up his notebook. But there is practically nothing in it because Schlauff did not utter a peel all the time he is in his deliriums. Except to mumble something which is beside the point."

"Let's have it."

The Sergeant delved in his slicker pocket, pulled out a fragment of damp teletype newsprint. On it were erratic capitals:

M AYBE I HAVE TAKE A XX
FEW D'RTY DOLLARS SBUT I
WOUDINGT WORK WITXH THAT
PA CK OF WOLVXES—

"I HAVE to take it on the typewriter," Mulcahey apologized, "whilst the officer reads it to me over the telephone. Excuse it, please." He squinted off to starboard where a deeper blotch of black to the southwest indicated Staten Island.

"How any periscope could be of use on a night like this, I fail to comprehend, skipper. I am doing well to keep off the Bay Ridge shore without the aid of a telescope."

"You can spot the quarantine anchorage with your naked eye." Koski leveled a finger a couple of points off the starboard bow. "But the pig-boats don't depend on vision. Radio locators and sound detectors are their dish in dirty weather."

"Speakin' of which, I'm hoping we don't have to go out past the lightship after your wolf. Them two cuddlers back there will be half drowned."

Koski touched the aluminum pot over the alcohol flame. The coffee was hot enough; he poured steaming liquid into thick white cups. "First aid to the love-lorn." He made his way back to the cockpit. "Mug up," he called above the thunder of the exhaust. "If you're not frozen stiff."

Ellen said: "I need that" and "Thanks."

Joslin muttered: "How about the net at the Narrows?"

"They'll have it open for us." Koski ducked a slap of spray that bobbled athwartship, moved forward as the loud-speaker began to croak.

". . . *St. George base calling Vigilant . . . come in, Vigilant . . .*"

Mulcahey clicked the "talk" lever:

"*Vigilant*, here . . . go ahead, *St. George* . . ."

"*Position one eight determined . . . Auxiliary at buoy fifteen main channel . . . acknowledge . . .*"

Koski put his mouth to the transmitter. "*Vigilant* should reach buoy fifteen in about . . . say ten minutes . . ."

"*Finished . . . Wynant . . . St. George . . .*"

A lance of light from the shore threw sudden illumination on a red and white striped buoy a hundred yards ahead; was extinguished before the men in the *Vigilant's* pilot-house could get more than a

brief, photographic impression of the net-tug inshore and the control vessel just beyond the net.

The Sergeant throttled down; nosed the patrol-boat past the ominous line of jagged spikes barely showing above the water. "I would sooner go on the rocks with a full gale behind me than try to run over that guard in one of them speed-boat hulls. 'Twould rip the bottom out like it was cardboard."

"The Japanazis can do enough damage offshore without coming in this close, Irish. Check off your channel markers, now."

They got up to speed again, roared through the night. There was a chop in the lower bay; by the time they made out the gray hull of a converted yawl at Buoy Fifteen, the *Vigilant* was plunging and bucking in toppling waves.

The yawl slid down Ambrose Channel; the Sergeant cut his speed to remain astern. "I trust our first-cabin passengers do not suffer from the *mal de mer*, coach."

"They'll take some tougher things than a cross-sea before the night's over."

Against the tapering tower of the West Bank beacon, they made out a clipper-bowed hull. Koski shone his pocket flashlight on the police flag. The yawl turned back toward the Narrows; the *Mohawk* glided gracefully out toward sea, with the *Vigilant* astern.

It was a mile farther before Koski realized they were already catching up to the convoy. The Coast Guard cutter had angled out of the main ship channel. A spot of white ahead became the foam of a propeller wash; the sound of the police-boat's exhaust echoed back from the high, iron wall of the tanker looming up beside them.

THE *Santa Pobrico* was the second vessel they overtook; her wheel was turning over just enough to give her steerage-way.

The *Mohawk* disappeared to port behind the dark bulk of the freighter. Koski reached for the megaphone on the binocular shelf. "Give me all the leeway you can, Irish. I'll be no monkey on a stick, with this rib the way it is." He clambered up on the forward deck.

He didn't need the megaphone. A rope ladder was already swaying down.

Mulcahey maneuvered as close as he dared. The patrol-boat lifted high on the crest of the ground-swell, its deck level with the bottom of the ladder. Koski sprang. The wave surged inshore. The *Vigilant* dropped away beneath him, down into the trough, left him dangling six feet out from the hull as the freighter rolled.

She came back. The Lieutenant thudded against the wet iron of the plate, wondered how much of a shock it took to set off a cargo of T.N.T. He began to climb. His side was an agony of torture before hands reached over the rail, hauled him up. Two men with gold braid on their caps steadied Koski at the ladder head.

"Piper, first officer," one of them put out his hand.

"Koski, Lieutenant." The man from the Harbor Precinct wiped his palms.

"Coast Guard says you have additional information about the man they searched for, this afternoon."

"Just learned he signed on under the name of Stanley. M. Stanley. Let's see your roster."

Piper led him to the bridge; unlocked a drawer; produced a board with a type-written sheet clipped to it. His finger ran down the list of names. "Here you are. Black gang. M. Stanley, oiler, second class."

"On watch now?"

"All hands are on duty until we take departure from the lightship. Want to see him?"

"Yair."

"Hope it doesn't take long. Convoy escort can't wait for laggards. Bad business to be left behind, where we're going."

"Might be worse to keep on. With this bird aboard."

They went aft to the poop deck where the four-inch gun pointed threateningly from behind its concrete emplacement; down steep companionways, through a narrow hatch. Piper climbed down the iron ladder to the engine-room grating, waited while Koski descended.

An elderly man with grizzled hair was making some adjustment on the valves of the big reciprocating engine; he glanced up from the rhythmic slide of the crank arm, nodded.

"Stanley around?"

The man jerked his head over toward

one shoulder. Koski turned. Bent over a circulating pump were muscular shoulders in a sleeveless undershirt. The man's face was hidden, but on the left arm Koski saw a white patch of adhesive. He started for the oiler, was still ten feet away when the man pivoted around. Black eyes, set in a white face like raisins in a blob of dough, darted suspiciously from Piper to the Lieutenant; the oiler backed against an asbestos-covered pipe, picked up a wrench. "Steady as she goes, Gjersten." Koski halted.

The man looked quickly over his shoulder, as if he expected someone else to be there. "Who you talking to?"

"Drop the wrench!" Koski took out his gun.

"My name's Stanley!"

"Save your breath! You're Ansel Gjersten! Show's over! Trip's off! Didn't end the way you expected, did it?"

Gjersten laughed, uncertainly. The wrench swung up at his side in what might have been a casual movement . . .

"Don't start anything!" Koski warned. "You'll go ashore feet first!"

THE WRENCH came down swiftly, smashed against a valve fixture. Steam jetted out fiercely into the engine-room, hissing like a locomotive.

"Why don't you shoot!" Gjersten flung himself to one side. "Shoot! Blow the damn ship out of the water, why don't you!" The oiler fumbled at his belt. "I'll do it for you—"

Koski gasped in air too hot to breathe, dropped to his knees, shielded his face with his arm. The engine-room clouded with vapor. Piper cried a warning, sprinted for a control valve.

Gjersten lay on one elbow, dragged an automatic from the waist-band of his pants. He took time to aim . . .

Koski dived, clubbing his service special. Flame spat in his face. A hot wire streaked across the side of his neck. He smashed at the black eyes with every ounce of strength he could put behind it, felt the bone of the man's skull crack . . .

The roaring of the steam deafened him. For an instant he wasn't sure whether the cargo had let go. Then the roaring blast from the steam pipe stopped hissing, became merely a hoarse, hot breath.

He rolled off Gjersten. The man was dead.

Piper came running back. Men poured down the iron ladder. There was a quarter hour of confusion, in the engine-room, on deck, in the executive cabin,—before Koski convinced the *Pobrico's* command that he had a right to take the body ashore. It was another fifteen minutes until the *Vigilant* got underneath the swaying ladder again and let Koski step off to the fore-deck.

"Hold her, Irish. Another one coming."

"Holy Mother." Mulcahey craned his neck up at the body being lowered in a sling. "You had to knock him out?"

"Permanently." Koski slashed the hoist-rope.

A canvas sea-bag came down like a descending pendulum over the pilot-house; Mulcahey leaned out, grabbed it, hauled it in, line and all. "If anyone was to scoot up and ask me," the Sergeant swung off toward the Narrows, "I would say a dead wolf is the best kind there is."

"He won't be biting, any more." Koski dragged his burden aft. The police-boat lurched away from the freighter.

Joslin called: "Need any help?"

"Yair. Drag it down to the cockpit."

"It *was* Gjersten," Ellen cried. "That other . . . in the morgue . . . that's Merrill."

"Yair. Must be."

"Means this skunk," Joslin piled the tarpaulin over on top of the body, "murdered Merrill"

"To get his papers," Mulcahey agreed.

"He got the papers, all right." Koski wet his handkerchief in sea-water, laid it across his neck where the bullet had raised a welt. "But he didn't kill Ovet. This," he touched the corpse with his toe, "isn't Bandage Face."

XXIV

ABOARD the *Seavett*, in Barbara's cabin, Hurlihan made the sheet of paper rattle in his fingers. "Certainly I came all the way out here so you'd sign another proxy. That fat-headed cop took the other one; wouldn't give it back."

She leaned forward on the vanity bench, puckering up her lips, wiping a tiny smudge of carmine from one corner of her mouth with the tip of her little finger. She could

see his reflection in the dressing-table mirror, but her eyes were attentive to her own features. "I'm frightfully sorry, Clem. But I've changed my mind about the proxy."

He caught her shoulder roughly, pulled her around, half facing him. "It's a little late in the day, for that."

"Circumstances do alter cases, darling."

"Only one kind that would change your point of view," he said coarsely. "Who is it this time? Fross? I thought it was queer he was so insistent about coming to the yacht with me, tonight."

"Don't be *absurd*. You know Henry couldn't have any appeal for me . . ." She exchanged lipstick for eyebrow pencil. "It's just that with the police searching for Merrill, it might be better to see what turns up."

THE SUPERINTENDENT refolded the paper angrily, jammed it back in his pocket. "I don't have to consult the oracles to guess your proxy'll turn up at the special stockholders' meeting,—in Hank's name. But it's my own damn fault. I *knew* better than to trust you."

"Don't be ugly, darling." She let her hand rest lightly on his arm. "I'm not siding with anyone else. It's just that Henry advised me sometime ago to be cautious until we know what's going to happen to Merrill. Now, if the police should catch him, it might make all the difference in the world."

He shook her hand off. "There's always been the chance his ship would be torpedoed and he'd be drowned or burned to death. *That* never stopped you from going behind his back. If he were dead you wouldn't be worried about a divorce and you could always hold up the Foundation by court action long enough to get some sort of settlement for yourself. That isn't what bothers you now. You're afraid to do anything Merrill might not like because then he might show up and let you take the blame he's been shouldering *on your account*."

"Why are you being nasty?" She was plaintive.

"Because you put me in a bad light with the police. That Lieutenant ran roughshod over me last night, as it was. I told him I spent the week-end on board because

you were giving me the proxy. Now if I don't vote it, he'll want to know what happens. It'll look queer. I tell you straight, Barbara,—if they try to pin anything on me, *I'm* not going to be the goat for you. Not in a homicide case."

She laughed deep in her throat. "You know I didn't murder Ansel."

"Cardiff thinks you did. Your Filipino thought so, or he wouldn't have quit you. Or maybe he beat it because he helped you dispose of the body."

"Cle-e-e-em!!"

"It wouldn't surprise me if you'd been fooling around with Ansel,—and that squarehead would have been a bad person to two-time. Not like some of the others . . ."

"It hurts me to have you feel that way, darling. But I can't blame you too much . . ." she pulled open a dressing-table drawer, drew out a sheet of note paper with a scorpion embossed in gilt in one corner. It was covered with lavender scrawls. "It's so easy to draw the **w**rong conclusion when you only have part of the facts. I made the same mistake when I only took Merrill's particular planet into account—"

"Don't start on that . . ."

" . . . when I should have considered the influence of *all* the planets, the sun, moon,—horizon and meridian—"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake."

The motors rumbled suddenly; the hull began to pulsate. "Cardiff's getting ready to pull out, Barbara. I'm ducking—"

"Wait, Clem. I can show you. I *know* who committed the murder—"

Knuckles rapped at the door. Hurlihan opened it.

Fross stood there, scowling. "Hurry up on deck. Rolf Berger just came aboard. With blood in his eye."

Ting-tang! Ting-tang! Ting-tang!
The ship's clock chimed hurriedly as if it feared being late for an appointment.

On deck, Cardiff gave orders:

"Northeast by north. Nothing to port. That'll be the bell off Execution Rock."

"Tide's sweeping us right along even at quarter-speed, Cap'n."

"Ought to make the shoal about eleven-thirty, if we don't pile up somewhere."

"What they really mean by dead reckoning, yes, sir."

Off Sands Point, off Rye Beach, off Great Captains Island, ships blew worried blasts on steam whistles; off Scotland Lightship at the mouth of the harbor, they whispered—held their breath . . .

IN THE *Seavett's* saloon, the Executive Director stood straddle-legged in front of the fireplace. The cannel coal glowed cherry-red at his back but its cheerfulness was not reflected on the faces of Barbara or Clem Hurlihan or Henry Suttle Fross.

"Lawford's not going to die tonight." Berger clasped his hands behind his back, thrust his chin forward truculently, "or I wouldn't be here. But worry about Merrill has nearly done for him, this time. He collapsed; after I found him, and rushed him to the hospital, the doctors said it was a paralytic stroke,—and you know what that means. He won't be able to take any active part in the business from now on. He knows it. He dictated a memorandum giving me power of attorney and managed to sign it with the last of his strength. I didn't want it. I don't want it now. Merrill ought to take charge, now. But the boy isn't here. And so Lawford asked me to do one thing for him." He glanced at his brief case, lying against the bulkhead.

"We're well aware," Fross crossed one leg over the other, inspected the snugness of his sock, "of your influence over Mister Ovett in matters of business."

"You are." Berger let his voice drop on the verb. "Well, what he asked me to do isn't a matter of business." He glared icily at the three of them in turn. "Lawford asks me to act *in loco parentis*. To look after Merrill. I gave him my word and by the Lord I mean to do it. I'll take his father's place in shielding him from the consequences of his own hotheadedness . . . or the cold-bloodedness of others."

Hurlihan wriggled his shoulders in discomfort. "I never believed he killed Gjersten. Maybe he knows who did and had his own reason for shielding that person. But I'm for Merrill. Always have been."

"Pah!" Berger hawked, turned and

spat into the coals. "You're for yourself. And always have been. You and Fross saw that Merrill'd absorbed a lot of half-baked idealism about the obligations of inheritance,—a man should never spend any money he hasn't earned himself,—that sort of slush. You knew he was friendly with this professional radical. So you made a deal with Joslin. Got him to use his influence with Merrill, induced him to assign his stock to this so-called Foundation. So you, in turn, could control the company through Joslin. Then all you'd have to do was find a way to bring pressure on Merrill."

Barbara pouted, prettily. "You're not being quite fair, Mister Berger."

The Executive Director gestured brusquely. "I don't intend to be fair. None of you would win any prizes for square dealing; the only way I know how to light fire is with fire. Merrill's in trouble. I may not be able to save him from that. But I'm not going to stand around and watch you deceive him and trick him and hoodwink him when he can't protect himself. When he gets back or when he can defend himself, I'll step out. Until then, *you're out*."

"What the hell!" Hurlihan jumped up.

Fross took off his pince-nez quickly. "I don't quite understand."

"You understand, all right. Until Merrill can get his hand on the helm, I'm running the Line. You are no longer our legal counsel, Mister Fross. You are no longer our superintendent, Clem Hurlihan. And you," he bowed stiffly to Barbara, "remain aboard this yacht only as long as you remain a decent wife."

"Mister Berger!"

"Merrill may not approve of my actions," Berger added. "For that reason alone, you two," he scowled fiercely at Fross and Hurlihan, "will continue to draw your salaries until he decides what to do about you. In the meantime," he punctuated his statement with bobbing head, "I'm going to have a superintendent who won't connive behind Merrill's back. And a lawyer who'll spend less time trying to put something over on the Line, its president or his son,—and more time to defending Merrill against this charge of murder,—or to finding out who did commit the crime." He clutched the lapels of

his coat, shook them once to indicate he had said his say. "If that's going to mean trouble for any of *you*, you've had fair warning!"

XXV

THE MIST had shut down again, a thick gauze that screened everything more than fifty feet from the pilot-house windows.

"The line the yacht's patrolling runs from Stratford Light over to the reef, Sarge. We ought to be able to hit her."

"We'll be lucky if we hit nothing else in this murk. Why they call it pea-soup fog I do not know. Pea soup is at least warm!" Mulcahey stuck his head out of the port window to peer anxiously in search of the buoy off Execution Rock. "Are you positive we're after the genuine culprit, now? I would hate to be looking for the wrong needle in a haystack as big as Long Island Sound."

"Yair. Koski glanced back at Ellen and Joslin, leaning against the cockpit gunwale. "I feel bad about smashing Gjersten's skull, though."

"For why, the scut?"

"He'd have pointed the finger at his partner, before the FBI boys got through with him. But maybe,—" he felt gingerly of his neck, "maybe he could do that just as well, the way he is . . ."

The *Vigilant* hit something. The shock jarred both men off their feet;—the patrol-boat shuddered and plunged on into the circling haze. They looked aft but could see nothing.

Mulcahey wiped his forehead. "One more like that and I will be ready to draw my pension."

"Didn't you ever hear about Farragut, Irish? Damn the driftwood . . ."

"I am giving her as near full speed as I can without having heart failure. It strikes me a funeral pace would be more appropriate, anyhow." The Sergeant groaned as a trawler materialized out of the fog, rushed past with a swirling wake. "I do not see why it could not have been this Gjersten who did the dirty job on young Ovett."

"The colored housekeeper at Dommy's saw two men in Room Five, Joe. One was Gjersten. Other was our friend with

a bandage around his chops. It couldn't have been young Ovett. He was dead then. Bandage Face was seen the next morning in the South Street dock."

"True for you, Steve. He was."

"Then Dommy's housekeeper heard Bandage Face singing while he was sawing up Merrill's body. The clerk at the drug-store saw him buy the suitcase. On the other hand, Ansel wasn't at the Bar-Nothing the *night* of the murder, because Claire Purdo was looking for him and couldn't find him, according to Schlauff. She might have gone up to Five looking for Ansel, heard Bandage Face singing, knocked on the door."

"But if this Man-in-the-White-Mask had popped his head out to see who it was, he probably wouldn't have had the bandage on at the time, skipper."

"Maybe not, Irish. If he didn't, that may have been a reason why he sent Ansel to rub her out. Or it could have been Ansel killed her on his own account."

A horn blew with terrifying closeness; the sound seemed to come from every point of the compass at once. Mulcahey threw out the clutch. The *Vigilant* rocked violently on the afterwash of some unseen vessel. "I would sooner be piloting a plane blindfolded, so help me." He got the boat under way again. "How did they identify young Ovett, now?"

"Collar bone broken in two places. He had it broken by a boom that jibed over on a sloop, few summers ago. Then the Wyatt girl had the measurements that wouldn't be affected by loss of weight,—length of leg, size of foot,—the works."

"A sin and a shame they had to see him like that. But this yacht captain, now. He was supposed to have seen young Ovett jump off the yacht."

"He saw Gjersten, in Merrill's suit."

"They were not the same size, were they, skipper? The suit would have fitted this Gjersten a trifle late?"

"Yair. But it fitted Merrill the same way, he'd lost so much weight."

"No one can blame you for misjudgment, there," Mulcahey sighed, dismally. "They're takin' it chin up, aren't they?"

"You sort of get hardened to the possibility of a guy's demising when he's in the merchant marine. It always was a possibility, but now—"

MULCAHEY swerved the patrol-boat toward a bell moaning in its sleep; a red can-buoy bobbed its cylindrical body up and down in a tide-race; told him he was on the course.

"I cannot figure it, at all. The man could not have sent that Sinbad telegram, bein' dead an' lyin' in the morgue."

"Wasn't any difficulty for the murderer, Sarge. Young Ovett probably had a letter from her," he nodded his head toward the cockpit, "in his pocket. Addressed to 'dearest Sinbad.' It likely said something about looking forward to seeing him when he got to town. All the killer had to know was that the Ellen who signed it was Ellen Wyatt and where she lived."

"It threw us well off the track, for a while."

"Sure. It sounded on the level because it was worded so whacky. Just the sort of wire young Ovett might send. But hell. I should have reasoned the killer would know the sort of expressions Ovett used, anyway. And that the boy'd been expecting to go through with a convoy."

"Why would the dirty murderer have mentioned the lad's intending to call on her the next day?"

"To give Gjersten time to escape on the *Pobrico*. He'd probably have dived overboard somewhere off Ambrose, swum to one of the bell buoys. He could have signaled the sub with one of those Coston flares we found in his sea-bag, been picked up by the pig-boat."

"That's the way he'd have tipped them off to the convoy's position. And another good ship gone wrong!"

"Maybe more than one."

"There is no doubt whatever about this identification of Gjersten?"

"Not any, Joe. We pulled the tape off his arm. There's tattooing under it. That four-bladed propeller Cardiff described. There probably was a swastika covered up by that propeller. The four blades would just about blot out one of those hooked crosses. And the numbers that Nazi naval ratings so often have tattooed on them for identification."

Mulcahey looked hard at him. "If ever I am inclined to homicide, I would pick another man to be after me. That's the truth. Submarines hunting in packs? Was that what Schlauff meant by wolves?"

"Part of it. Not all of it. The rest of it's aboard the *Seavett*. That might be her;—that little loom, couple points to the north. Let her out to the last gap, Irish. We want to finish fast."

XXVI

"YAIR." Koski leaned against the jamb of the door to the saloon to ease his rib. "The man who got hacked up was Merrill."

"You must be *mistaken!*" Barbara's mouth was pulled down desolately at the corners; her eyes were feverishly brilliant.

"We were mistaken. Long enough." Koski looked them over:—Berger belligerent before the fireplace, Hurlihan slumping dejectedly in one of the red leather chairs. Fross sitting bolt upright in the other, adjusting his pince-nez. At one end of the transom seat, Barbara with her legs curled under her; at the other, Ellen and Joslin sitting stiffly side by side. "Plenty of reasons for making that kind of mistake . . ."

"Captain Cardiff reported Gjersten as missing. You told me noboddy would see Gjersten again, Mrs. Ovett. That Filipino we've got down in the Tombs referred to Ansel as dead. Place where the body was dismembered was the sort of dive Gjersten would be likely to visit. He did go there. He was seen. He didn't take his clothes with him off the yacht. He didn't draw the pay due him. He was heard arguing with young Ovett. Nobody heard him at all after that. Nobody reported seeing him after this yacht took you over to the Wall Street landing, Hurlihan. All circumstantial, sure. But it sidetracked us. It was calculated to throw us off the track, part of it."

Hurlihan scrunched lower in his chair; his black curls were matted with sweat. "You told me yourself the body . . . what you had found of it . . . corresponded to Gjersten's description."

"IT DID. And it didn't check with Merrill's losing so much weight in that lifeboat. He'd lost about forty pounds. Threw our Identification Bureau off on their comparative height tables, too. We had pretty accurate measurements of Merrill." He didn't glance at Ellen. "Sec-

tions of the body that came out of the water didn't slow any close comparison to those measurements. They were pretty close to what we knew about Gjersten."

"The dead man might not be Ansel." Barbara hung her head in what was intended to be a woe-begone manner. "But you're just making another mistake if you claim it's Merrill. Because Merrill wasn't in Brooklyn. He jumped off the yacht at Wall Street. Captain Cardiff saw him."

Koski shook his head with a minimum of movement. "Cardiff made that error. Unassisted. He thought he saw Merrill. But he didn't get a real look at him. Didn't notice him until the *Seavett* was five or six feet out from the float. All he saw then was a man in a blue serge suit, sprawling on the float after jumping. It was night. It was foggy. And the suit was Merrill's. But the man inside it must have been Ansel Gjersten."

"It isn't plausible," Barbara insisted. "Nobody saw Ansel on board after we left Rodd's Yard."

"Nobody would have seen him, Mrs. Overt. If he'd been in Merrill's stateroom, changing into Merrill's clothes."

"Right after Clem left at Wall Street, Merrill jumped ashore." Barbara sighed with impatience. "Otherwise, he'd have been aboard next morning."

Koski said: "He left while you were still at the dock in Brooklyn. Right after Gjersten came back to the yacht. Chances are Gjersten gave him some decoy message to get him to go to this disreputable house. Gjersten might have told him some pal of his was in trouble there. Probably this union lad, here. The murder room was taken in Joslin's name. It would have had to be some frameup like that to get Merrill into that Red Hook rat-hole. One thing sure, he wasn't aboard this tub; he wasn't seen aboard it after you left Rodd's. You told me he was sulking in his tent, Mrs. Overt. You were way off. He probably thought he was rushing to rescue a friend."

Berger cleared his throat, gruffly. "I can't contradict you on what happened here on the boat or in Brooklyn. What sets wrong in my craw is that Merrill was alive this morning. His father talked to him on the phone."

"Thought he did." Koski nodded. "Be natural to expect a man to recognize his

son's voice. But there were what the parole people call mitigating circumstances."

"Lawford didn't mention any to me, sir."

"First place, the old man is half deaf."

"Not so deaf anyone could fool him, pretending to be Merrill."

"Yair. When you take second place into account. Second place was, he'd had a shot of dope the night before. It hadn't worn off by the time he got to your office,—an hour or so after the call."

"That's so." Berger stared at Clem. "That is so."

"Then you told me Mister Overt thought the call came from a saloon. Only way he'd have known that would have been because of the racket. Good place for Gjersten to talk from if he was pretending to be Merrill. Another reason for being sure the call was phony,—the guy at the other end of the line didn't talk long. Not long enough to arouse the old man's suspicions. Damn queer way to talk to your own father when you'd just been rescued. After twelve days in a lifeboat. Merrill would have had more than that to say. Joslin told me Merrill tried to phone his father Sunday afternoon. Not just to say three sentences." He shifted his position; the pain in his side was suddenly sharper. "Idea was the same as a wire he was supposed to have sent. Make everybody look for Merrill,—instead of Gjersten."

Clem chewed on his lower lip, dubiously. "I had a different idea about the murder, but say you're right. It still doesn't prove Ansel was the murderer." He leaned back to keep Barbara within his range of vision. "It might have been someone else,—who paid Ansel to do away with the . . . uh . . . remains, to make that phone call. Somebody who hoped, with Merrill out of the way—"

"—to get control of the Line," Berger broke in sharply. "Yes . . . indeed!"

"No." Koski's voice was dull with fatigue. "Nothing to do with all this security hocus-pocus. If the idea'd been to get hold of Merrill's shares, or his estate, or his inheritance,—the body wouldn't have been cut up to conceal its identity. Other way 'round. Body would have to be identified before there'd be any sense to the crime. Purpose of the mutilation was to hide the dead man's identity long enough to let Gjersten get out of the country. Aboard

the *Santa Pobrico*. Killer might have stood to profit by Merrill's death. But not by having it known."

"There is a discrepancy." Foss smoothed his mustache. "You say Gjersten sailed on the *Pobrico*?"

"As an oiler, yair."

"Then it couldn't have been Gjersten who assaulted Morrie Schlauff. Because the officers who came around to my office sometime after . . . after you left . . . I presume they were acting on your instructions?"

"Go on. Presume."

"—told me Morrie must have been attacked at just about the time the *Pobrico* was pulling away from her pier."

"Yair."

KOSKI waited until the Penfield Reef siren ceased its periodic groan. "Gjersten didn't slug Schlauff. Schlauff was after information about Merrill. Doped it out that it ought to be worth something to know the whereabouts of a rich man's son, accused of murder. Had no idea what he was going up against. Accidentally went right to the head man behind this business. He asked the wrong question, guessed the right answer. So maybe the key man tried to buy him off. Maybe he just decided to knock him off. Gjersten wasn't mixed up in that."

Barbara asked: "Why are you hunting for *him*, then? Why don't you go after this . . . this head man you talk about?"

"Oh, Gjersten was a killer." Koski felt the *Seavett* heel to starboard, knew the yacht must be turning on the inshore leg of the patrol. "He was in on Merrill's murder. Worked with the boss-guy. Helped put over the message about Joslin. They knew Merrill was a friend of Joslin. Would probably have gone to his aid if word came this union lad was in dutch. So Gjersten let the other man use his room at the dive. But he was probably afraid he'd be identified by the girl he'd taken to the same room in the afternoon. So today, when he learned from the papers the body had been discovered, he must have found where she lived, got in her room up the fire-escape, shot her when she came in. Gjersten was deadly, but he didn't have the knowledge to do the big job the head man was doing."

"Knowledge?" Foss took off his glasses,

put them on again, and coughed delicately.

"Special kind of information. Information that would be useful to enemy subs off our coast."

The quietness of the saloon was deepened by the dismal bellow of the siren on the reef. Koski went on:

"Man would have to know about ships. Ship sailings. Ship routes. Might know more about Ovett ships than any others. Have to be familiar with radio. Short-wave. Sending and receiving. Either have one himself or have access to it." Koski wasn't watching Barbara, but he could hear her breathing,—like a runner at the finish of a sprint. "He'd have to be able to dress like a seaman. Act like one. Know his way around the waterfront, or how to find his way around without being noticed. He was smart enough to tie a bandage around his chin. So everyone noticed the bandage. Nobody noticed him."

Ellen stood up, rigidly. "He doesn't have a swastika mark on his arm, like Gjersten. He has it branded into his heart."

Joslin came up off the seat, too. "He's worse than a Nazi. Because he doesn't wear the lousy label where it can be seen. He's the dirtiest dog on earth. A Quisling."

They both looked at Berger.

XXVII

BERGER squinted at her, gaped at her as if she were demented. His apple-red cheeks purpled. Veins traced dark threads on his forehead.

"Me!" he bellowed,—raised his arm to strike Joslin.

Koski stepped in, swiftly, got between them.

He was too close to use punches. There was only room for quick jabs, keeping Berger off balance.

"Yair! You!—"

A push.

"You answer the requirements—"

A shove, crowding Berger's legs against the transom seat.

"—you found Merrill's union cards on him. After you killed him—"

A prod in the stomach.

"—that gave you the idea of getting Ansel out of the country by switching identities—"

Another push.

"—you had a short-wave in your office. Or close to it—"

A blow, ramming Berger back on the padded seat.

"—I saw the glass insulator spools outside your window-sill this morning. And that office of yours has practically an airplane view of ships leaving the harbor."

A HOARSE groan from the *Seavett's* fog horn made the saloon hideous with vibration. Joslin wrestled Fross into a corner on the chance he might interfere. Barbara tugged excitedly at Hurlihan: "Taurus! The bull! If I'd only been certain about Ansel's birth hour . . . I'd never have made such a mistake, Clem!"

The Executive Director struggled to stand up. "Before you . . . get yourself . . . in any deeper, Lieutenant . . . better consider . . . who you're . . . defaming."

"I know who I'm talking to. Same guy Schlauff talked to. He catch you at the earphones when he walked into your office without knocking, tonight?—

He toppled the spy back against the cushions.

"—you slug him from behind?—

A straightarm to the chest.

"—after you went down in the elevator with him?—

An open hand wallop on the shoulder.

"—maybe you thought he was dead. After you cracked his skull!"

Berger held up his elbows to ward off Koski's attack.

The Harbor Squad man cuffed him hard on the head. "Schlauff wasn't dead. But he couldn't have gotten up and walked. Not further than across Battery Park from the lobby of your office building to the Pier—

He hooked rapid-fire lefts to the side of the spy's jaw; short, stinging blows that didn't travel more than a few inches.

"not with a fracture like that. This morning, in your office, I thought how nice it was for you to be right close at hand. In case we wanted you. We want you now."

"Give me . . . chance to . . . disprove your . . . filthy lies." Berger raged in cold fury.

"You'll have your chance. Way we do things over here. You'd get a quick cur-

tain if you'd pulled this in Himmelerland. Here you'll have time to polish up that nonexistent alibi—"

The maniac howl of the siren on Penfield Reef punctuated Koski's scorn.

"Who's your Shipowners' Council—other than you and Lawford Ovet? Only person who could prove you weren't in Brooklyn Sunday afternoon is an old man who's in the hospital now. You made a hell of a fuss about *my* not annoying this lifelong friend of yours, but still you didn't mind roaring at me like a mad bull there in his bedroom last night. Gave me to cogitate at the time, that did. . . . Now, the old boy's in such shape he won't be able to be a witness against you." Koski held him by the throat.

"Witnesses!" Berger choked. "You talk . . . of witnesses . . . when you . . . have none. . . ."

"Yair, yair. We got a few. Clerk at the drugstore where you bought the suitcase. Youngster at the pier where you dumped the suitcase in the river. Colored maid at the Bar-Nothing. And Ansel. You won't be glad to know it—but *we've got little Ansel.*"

"Don't even . . . know Gjersten . . . to speak to!"

"You spoke to him. On the phone at Rodd's. Told him Merrill suspected how the sub commander knew 'Captain Ovet' was aboard the *Mercede*. Merrill probably came direct to you. Or phoned you at your club soon's he hit town. You saw the fat was in the fire. You had to put him out of the way. Or your slimy game was up—

He shook the spy until the white hair flopped down over his eyes.

"You figured out how to decoy Merrill to Dommy's place. You got over there, waited for him . . . and I don't have to figure out how you spent your time *that* night!"

Berger screeched: "Fross! Hurlihan! Take him . . . off me. . . . Take—"

Joslin snatched up the poker from the set by the grate. "Who wants it first! You'll get it, if you cut in!"

None of the others moved.

KOSKI flattened his lips against his teeth. "You're the sort of scum who always wants someone else to do your

dirty work. Can't stand to be told what you have to do. Not even by your own government. In wartime. Don't mind bullying your hired hands. But have apoplexy when they tell you what they consider fair treatment. Want a country run your way or to hell with it. Well . . ." he put his face close to Berger's. "You're not going to run it your way. You're not going to send it to hell. Not with all the brown-shirted, black-hearted bums behind you. . . ."

Berger struggled desperately: "You've no proof! But I have. You can't prevent me . . . common decency . . . my brief case." He lunged in a frenzy toward the brief case he had set against the bulkhead.

Koski struck him in the face. The Executive Director fell back on the seat.

The Lieutenant picked up the brief case. "Don't care for the things you do with luggage. What's in this you want so bad?" He unbuckled the leather strap.

"Letter," Berger spat out savagely. "From the . . . Navy Department. Read it. . . . Then you'll understand—"

The detective snapped the catch, opened the case.

Poong!!

There was a flash like a thousand photobulbs at once. A burst of dense smoke. No detonation. No concussion. But an instantaneous sensation of terrific heat—numbing in its fierce intensity. It galvanized Koski into reflex action. He flung the case toward the companionway. A dazzling streak of molten metal like the tip of an acetylene torch showed through the trailing fumes.

The streak of incandescence flowed through the engine-room bulkhead as if it had been paper, left a blazing gap in the paneled pine. Through the aperture, for a split second, vivid blue sheeted out.

There was no time for anything except a frantic groping up the companionway to the deck-house. Berger got to the steps first, tore up on deck. Barbara got in Koski's way long enough to balk him; then the Harbor Squad man waited until the others had all gone ahead of him.

On deck, the whistle went into frenzy with Cardiff hanging to the cord. The *Vigilant* came thundering up on the starboard quarter. Flame breathed up the

companionway. Something said, "*Huff*" in a tremendous voice that seemed to ring in Koski's ears for ten endless seconds. The transom and after deck of the yacht opened up like a wet cardboard box.

While he herded the others over into the *Vigilant's* cockpit, Koski scanned the water. He could hear Berger swimming. In the fog there was no possibility of seeing him.

"Come on, Steve!" Mulcahey yelled. "I got them all aboard here. Except the one that jumped. *Come on!*"

"Hold it, Irish."

The yacht's deck tilted sharply to port. The bow canted up. A long tongue of orange leaked out over the water. The fog was suddenly luminous—white steam in the brilliant glare of a giant headlight. There was a curious rushing sound in the air. For a hundred feet around the burning yacht, the sea blossomed out in a quivering carpet of orange and yellow. The gas from the tanks had spread.

Twenty yards astern of the sinking *Seavett* a white spot rose above the surface. A hand shot up into the air, clutched flame.

Berger screeched once, went under.

The hand showed again for an instant. The head didn't.

Koski pointed. "Jam her full reverse, Joe! Watch it! Don't slash us with the wheel. I'm going for him!"

He jumped in, feet first, the way a waterman does when debris floats on the surface.

XXVIII

"WHAT WAS IT, STEVE?"

"Thermite. Stuff they use for incendiaries. Had it fixed to go off when the brief case was opened." Koski glanced at the soggy heap beside the *Vigilant's* engine housing. There was no bandage around Rolf Berger's face now, but there would be one as soon as the police-boat could reach the Coast Guard control boat. The white hair was burned off one side of the man's head, his coat had been ripped by the boathook when Mulcahey dragged him up over the gunwale.

"I am cruising along beside the yacht wondering if all goes according to plan," Mulcahey peered off toward the violet haze where the water still blazed, "and I see this flash about twice as bright as the

loom of Greens Ledge light. Then *boom* and you all come shooting out on deck like in one of them old shifting pictures in which everything is speeded up double."

"It happened like that, Irish." Koski pressed his lips together and caught his breath at the jagged agony in his side. "One second there we are, building brother Berger up to a terrific letdown. Next second, where are we!" He squdged water out of his shoes.

"Four hundred gallons of super-test, so the Cap'n says. Went up in one minute. And down in five. She sank while I was draggin' you both aboard."

"Lucky you were there to hold my hand. . . ."

"Not bad for a foggy night, coach." Mulcahey cut the motor switch, stuck his head out into the fog, listening for the howl of the Penfield siren. When he heard it he held his hand over the compass card, pointing toward the reef. He started the motor, swung the *Vigilant* on a course directly opposite. "Personally, I will feel better when this reptile is out from underfoot."

"I thought you were going to say underground."

"Okay. I say it. At that he reminds me of the only other guy I ever knew who would rather work for Hitler than his own country."

"I heard that one. Gravedigger up at the cemetery, hah?"

"So you know all the answers. Be so kindly as to tell me some."

"Hell of a lot of them I don't know."

"What I have been attempting to elucidate on my own with no success is, how did the short-wave crystal happen to get in that suitcase with the mangled remains?"

"That comes under what the defense attorney will call the realm of pure conjecture, Joe. You want my conjecture?"

"So who has a better one?"

"OKE. Mine is, when Merrill got to Room Five, he expected to meet Joslin. Guy he did meet was Ratzi here. Probably was a set-to. At a guess, on or near the bed. Say the crystal was in Berger's pocket. It fell out during the

fracas. He didn't notice it. Later, when he needed the sheet for a little shroud-work, he probably crumpled it up without noticing the crystal, jammed it over the body in the suitcase."

"There seems to be a slight loophole, Steven."

"Such as—"

"If the crystal was Berger's, how could Ansel have been using the short-wave set on the yacht, tell me that?"

"Sure. They'd both have crystals. So they could plug 'em in or pull 'em out of the set in Berger's office or on the *Seavett* as opportunity might knock. Be too dangerous for them to always send from the same place."

"I vote guilty on the first ballot. Only one other query. Why did Berger dump part of the remains into the Gowanus and lug the torso clear over to the East River?"

"Wanted to keep us from dredging up the whole of it—if any part should come to the surface. Less we'd find, harder it would be to identify. He got away with that. The part that would have helped us we *haven't* found. Might not." He sneaked a brief glance sternward at Joslin, apart from the others, holding Ellen in his arms. "I hope we never do."

"What interests me more is, will we be finding any more of Berger's partners in treachery?"

"Consult the star-student back there. I can't read the lines in Berger's palm. Be up to the feds, from here in, anyway. And Navy Intelligence. They'll likely find out Gjersten was only one of the hands on the Nazi payroll. A pipe-line like this," he touched Berger with his shoe, "generally has other outlets."

"How did you persuade the bird to sing? I told him we had Ansel. But I guess I forgot to mention Gjersten was cold meat."

"You forgot! Yeah! You remembered to save *him* from burning to death, though."

Koski saw the violet glow pale down to a thin gauzelike haze, die out. The fog shut down; the police-boat moved slowly on through a film of mist.

"I won't do that a second time, Irish. You can call your odds on that. Next time there's any burning he's on his own."

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DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN

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Plenty of dead ones get dragged out of the dark, roily water that runs through the greatest city in the world. The Harbor Police take only routine notice. But when the cadaver comes in installments—a torso, a leg, an arm—that's murder . . . There are lots of murders, sure, but what made Lieutenant Steven Koski do a double-take on this particular butchery was the gadget that came with the torso. In its own frightful little way it was a weapon—the kind of weapon that kills a lot of people kind of quick. And Koski began to move—but fast. The murder marathon took him from a Coast Guard auxiliary vessel (cargo: one stunning blonde) to a waterfront dive. From a union leader's hangout to an executive's luxurious office. From a Chinese laundry to a ship being loaded with sudden death . . . And all the way, a long thin shape, detestable and horrible, paced him. Koski drove himself frantically onward. He had to catch that thing—*had to* . . .

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